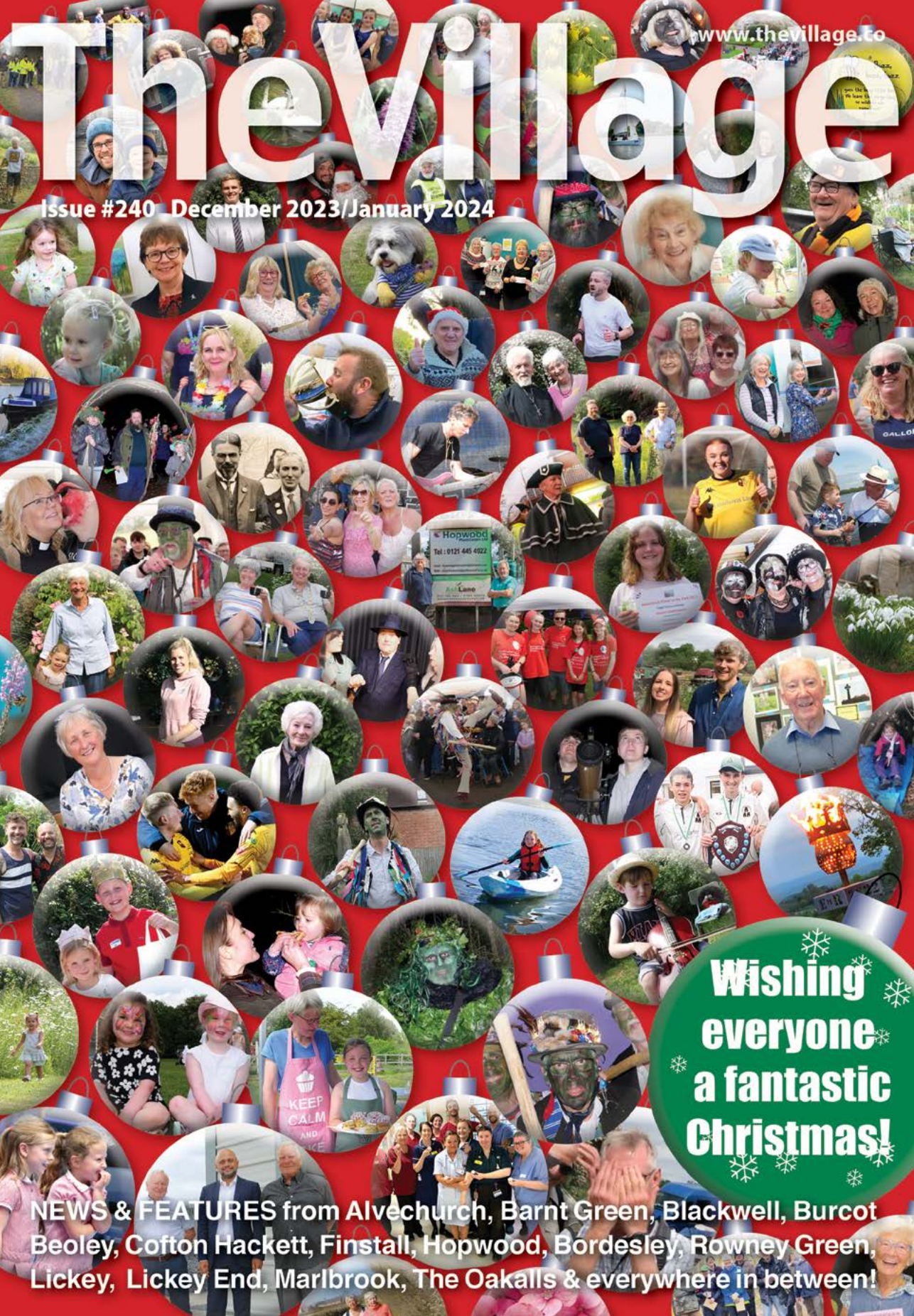
# TheVillage

www.thevillage.to

Issue #240 December 2023/January 2024

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TheVillage Issue 240 Dec 23 / Jan 24


# inside

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**Front cover: Just a few of the faces and places featured in *The Village* over the past year.**

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# CALA saga takes a new twist

A NEW pedestrian gate installed by a housing developer to provide access to public open space on a village estate is . . . locked!

District councillor Charlie Hotham, who has been pursuing the case on the CALA Homes site in Barnt Green for the past five years, was flabbergasted to discover a keypad device had been installed on the new gate, preventing access to all without the code.

Arriving at the site with a photographer from *The Village* to celebrate installation of the gate, Coun Hotham could not believe his eyes and said: "What is the point of this? It is really very annoying. I'll be informing the planning officer immediately so they can investigate."

**Flabbergasted:** Coun Charlie Hotham discovers the new gate is locked.

The new public access gate was the result of a breach of planning conditions notice issued earlier this year by Bromsgrove District Council, which had insisted on a public right of way through the site during the planning process.

In September a CALA representative apologised for the time it was taking to install the gate, saying it was "a great source of embarrassment".

# 'GHETTO ESTATE' VETO

A VILLAGE affordable housing estate recommended for approval by planning officers has been rejected by councillors who feared it could "ghettoise" residents and set a dangerous precedent in the Green Belt.

The plan for 34 homes, all of them classed as "affordable" and for rental, was proposed for the site in Hopwood, which has a long history of failed applications.

Most recently, in 2022, a plan for 22 homes on the site by the main roundabout in the hamlet was rejected, and in the past 30 years applications for warehousing, offices, a pub, a nursing home and various housing schemes have all been rejected or withdrawn by the applicant.

Despite this history, the Bromsgrove planning officer overseeing the application recommended approval for the 34 homes, to be run by a housing association. He told Bromsgrove council's planning committee meeting that the fact the application was for 100 per cent affordable housing meant there were "very special circumstances" outweighing the harm the development would cause to the Green Belt.

He also considered the land to be "previously developed", or brownfield, although Alvechurch Parish Council had objected, saying they believed "the site has a manufactured brownfield appearance".

Bromsgrove planning councillors expressed serious doubts about the sustainability of the scheme, being isolated a long way from facilities and with very little local transport.

A number were worried that it could lead to the "ghettoisation" of residents in need of lower cost accommodation and they felt that affordable housing worked best when mixed with market housing.

Coun Charlie Hotham, the district councillor for Barnt Green and Hopwood Ward, warned that allowing 100 per cent affordable housing developments to trump protection of the Green Belt would "set a very dangerous precedent" and could lead to housing on the Green Belt across the district.

When it came to a vote on the recommendation to approve, no councillor was willing to propose it and the the committee agreed to an alternative motion to reject it.

The grounds given to the applicant were that the plan being solely for affordable housing did not outweigh the significant harm to the Green Belt it would pose.

The development would also be unsustainable because its distance from essential services and lack of public transport would mean residents would be reliant on using cars.

# Festival gets 2024 go-ahead

BARNT GREEN parish councillors have agreed to go ahead with another Social Eats Music and Street Food Festival next year, despite concerns raised by villagers over this year's event.

Residents complained of dangerous parking, thumping music and the failure by the organisers to provide promised free tickets for properties neighbouring Bittell Road playing fields, where the event was held.

But parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley said the council had since held a meeting with the lead organiser who had reassured them that a future festival would run smoothly.

Coun Cholmondeley said: "We need to be quite tight on what we expect, but I think over all it went quite well."

The council agreed to a provisional date of Saturday September 7.

# Securing shops

AFTER BARNT Green retailers raised concerns about a "tsunami of shoplifting", a security guard has been seen on patrol at the entrance to the Tesco Express store in the village.

One of the complaints was that gangs of thieves were drawn to the village by easy pickings at Tesco and then targeted smaller shopkeepers while in the area.

Police and retailers were due to meet at the parish council offices to discuss further initiatives as *The Village* went to press.

# Parish presence

ALVECHURCH Parish Council is to meet at different venues throughout the year to make them more accessible to villagers.

In the past, all full council meetings have been held at Hopwood Community Centre, which is owned by the council. Councillors agreed next year to hold four at Hopwood, four at the Ark in Alvechurch and four at Rowney Green. Acting chairman Paul Edwards said: "This is about having a presence in all of the parish."

# Canal reopens after landslide

**THE WORCESTER & Birmingham Canal was closed between Alvechurch and Tardebigge for more than a month after a landslip just south of the Shortwood Tunnel.**

**Clearing and stabilisation of the bank by teams of contractors (above) was sufficiently completed for the canal to reopen on November 25, but the towpath will remain closed (below) while the Canal & River Trust works out how to reinstate it safely.**

# Lifts still in limbo

THERE IS still no timetable for the arrival of long-promised passenger lifts for Barnt Green station, parish councillors heard.

Or if there is, Network Rail isn't telling the parish council what it is.

Parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley said: "I was a bit miffed that they said they could not tell us what was going on because they have to tell our MP first." All the parish has been told is that NetworkRail is now "doing some survey work".

"I am surprised that work has not already been done," said Coun Cholmondeley. "Having got the approval from the Department for Transport, you would think that they had already done the survey."

One hope for a better flow of information is via a personal email Coun Cholmondeley sent to Network Rail.

He told fellow councillors: "I had an email from Denise Wetton, who I think is quite senior, who has admitted that communication has not been what it should be and has committed to give me monthly updates."

# The 'Lickey Gap'?

THREE SCOTS pines as old as 60 years were felled by vandals on Rednal Hill in the Lickeys. The trees were on the edge of the area damaged by fire last year. It is not known if it was a random act of vandalism or a copycat action following the felling of the Sycamore Gap tree on Hadrian's Wall.

# Making beds

THE COACH & Horses pub at Weatheroak Hill has been given planning permission to expand the business by adding 12 bedrooms.

Meanwhile, a decision on the controversial application to extend the former Alvechurch Social Club to create a 28-room budget hotel is now unlikely to be made before next year.



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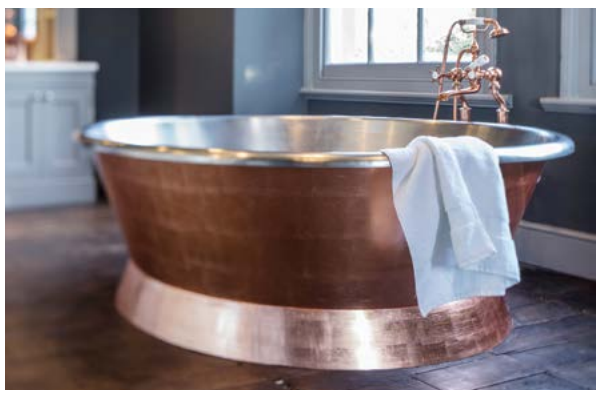

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# The golden parish

Alvechurch Parish Council is celebrating being the first parish in *The Village* area to achieve Quality Gold Status.

It is only the second local council in Worcestershire to receive the award and is only one of 52 councils out of around 10,000 across the whole country to reach this level.

Awarded by the National Association of Local Councils, gold status recognises that Alvechurch is "at the cutting edge of good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement, going beyond its legal obligations in continuously seeking opportunities to improve and innovate".

Parish chairman Marc Worrall said: "I am delighted that Alvechurch Parish Council has been accredited as a Quality Gold Council and very proud the work being done in our parish is considered an excellent example to other local councils in Worcestershire and across the country.

"A well-deserved thanks is due to our clerk, Jayne Smailes, and Coun Paul Edwards, as they were instrumental in preparing and submitting our application," he added.

Making the award at the council's office in George Road, Alvechurch, award panel chairman John Duddington, said: "All residents should be proud of the council and what it has achieved and, I am sure, will achieve in the future."

**Achievement:** John Duddington, Chairman of the Worcestershire Local Award Panel, presents the certificate to parish chairman Marc Worrall, flanked by (from left) parish clerk Jayne Smailes, Coun Barry Thornton, Coun Nigel Cutress and parish vice-chairman Coun Paul Edwards.

## Village flooding under spotlight

**BEOLEY PARISH councillors decided to wade into action after autumn floods in the village.**

**The councillors toured the problem spots (pictured, right) to prepare a report highlighting areas that needed to be tackled by Worcestershire County Council.**

**Councillors also surveyed damage to the protective stones surrounding the War Memorial at St Leonard's Church. Adrian Craddock, of Craddock Metal Recycling, Beoley, is donating a number of cast iron bollards to be concreted in place to offer more robust protection to the memorial.**

**The parish council has welcomed a new member for Portway, Coun Karen Smith, who is a chartered surveyor, with a keen interest in the local countryside and development.**

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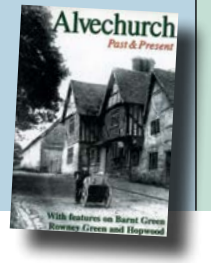
# 20 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

OUR COVER 20 years ago featured, as it has in December ever since, a collection of faces and places from the previous year's magazine (although it has a more festive feel these days). There are a few blasts from the past on there and some who are still part of village life, including the current Editor of this magazine!

**ALSO IN THE NEWS:** The new £180,000 meeting room was opened at St Catherine's Church, Blackwell. It has become known as The Wheel, thanks to its shape and the spoke-like roof construction, seen on this picture featuring Rev Philip Swan, organist Judy Hickman-Smith and reader Christine Allen.

**AT ANOTHER** Blackwell launch, MP Julie Kirkbride claps with delight as pupils release ballons to mark the opening of a new classroom at Linthurst First School.




**TWO BOOKS on the history of the area reached a total of £8,000 raised for local organisations.**

# 10 Years Ago

From **The Village** archive

BY DECEMBER 2013 our faces and places from the previous year appeared in baubles on the cover, with many recognisable mugs beaming out. It was the first time a pantomime horse had been among them, although The Village magazine's nag probably didn't deserve such prominence after its performance at the Picnic in the Park!

**COFTON HACKETT** residents gathered to remember Peter "Pierre" Smith, their postman for 28 years and a Neighbourhood Watch stalwart, at the planting of an oriental cherry tree in his memory. on the roundabout outside Cofton Post Office.

**'WILL THE GREEN BELT BE HOLED AT HOPWOOD'** was our headline on a story about a planning application to build 22 homes on a field by the main roundabout in the hamlet. Alvechurch Village Society was "incensed, puzzled and very dismayed" on hearing Bromsgrove planners had deferred a decision, against the recommendation of their own officers to refuse on the grounds of protecting the Green Belt. As we know now, it was eventually turned down, as was another application in 2021 – and another last month for 34 affordable homes (*See Page 5*).

**A team from The Swan pub, Alvechurch, won the Leisure League Five-a-side football competition. Back, from left: Garry Farmer, Lee Ewens, Dane Morgan, Luke Gibbs. Front, from left: Mark Doherty, James Cornbill (assistant manager), Angelo Palmiero (manager), Connor O'Reilly.**

# Just ask and you...

**Dear Editor –** I am writing to you regarding the overgrown bridleway known locally as the "Stocken" from Chestnut Drive to Cofton Church Lane, Cofton Hackett.

Recently I've become a regular user again of this bridleway with a wheelchair. How disappointing it is to see how overgrown it's become over the years.

Landowners are responsible for the hedges and Worcestershire County Council are responsible for anything growing out of the path.

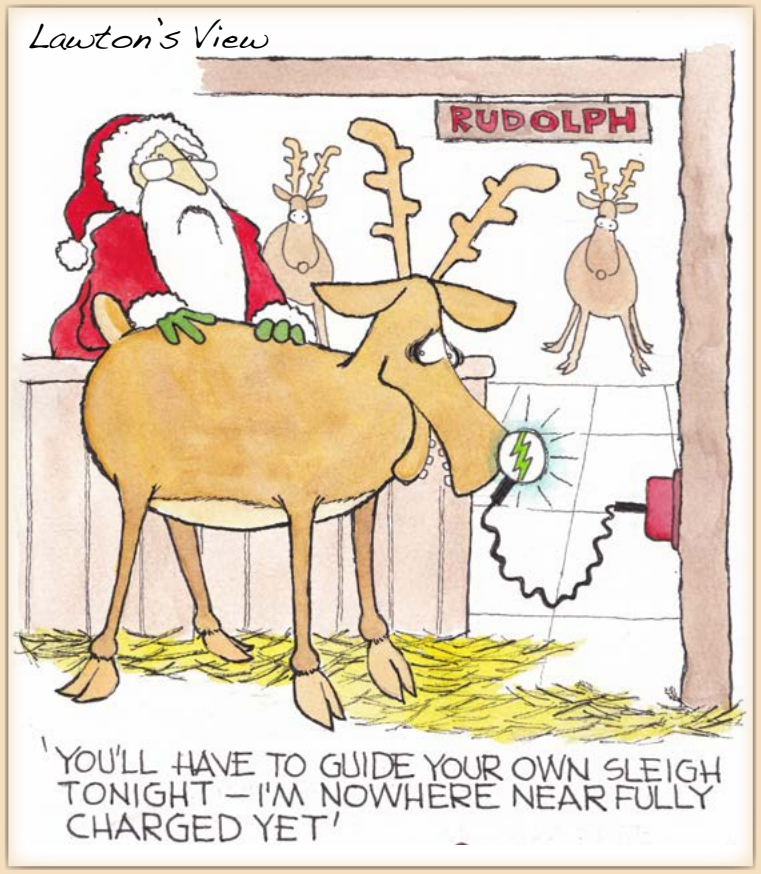
When I was young, there were two removable posts at Cofton Church Lane End, which could be removed for maintenance work for hedge cutting once a year by the farmer.

Bridleways should not be lost like this, it's a very important part of old Cofton Hackett.

I just hope they return this bridleway back to what it once was.

It won't be easy, but will benefit everyone in the long run. Bridleways need to be saved for the future so horses and the disabled can access the countryside safely.

**A concerned resident**
**Cofton Hackett**




## . . . will receive!

**Dear Editor –** A huge thank you to Paul at Worcestershire County Council public rights of way, working with myself, to finally get the Stocken bridleway cleared (right). Also huge thanks to Mike Patterson, of Cofton Hackett Parish Council, for his tireless efforts.

**Mike Harrington, Cofton Hackett**

## Have your say . . . about anything!

**email: editor@villageonline.co.uk**

**Please include your name and address – even if you request them to be withheld from publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions for reasons of space or legality.**

**The deadline for the next issue is January 5th 2024.**





# WHERE'S VINNY?

**ST ANDREWS First School pupil, Charlotte Lias, aged six from Cofton Hackett, shows off the Mini Vinny she won for finding the little creature in November's hunt the hedgehog competition in *The Village*.**

**If you want to win one for yourself, you'll need to try to find the little hedgehog hiding somewhere in this magazine (the one shown above is just a guide).**

**Tell us where he's hiding via email – see details on bottom of the page opposite – and please include your name, address and phone number, and we'll draw a winner at random.**

**The closing date is midnight on December 20 2023. We'll let you know if you've won and you can collect your Mini Vinny from our office – and pose for a photo with your prize!**

## Barriers to safety

**Dear Editor –** Can it be six months? Surely not. Well 12 months then? No, more like 18 months.

The unsightly car-damaged barrier on Red Lion Street has remained unrepaired and a danger to pedestrians of Alvechurch for a record length of time, even by Worcestershire Highways standards.

Meanwhile, speeding cars through the village pose a threat to life and limb. Even an unenforceable 20mph restriction, two mini-roundabouts and two pinch-points, along with two pelican crossings, have failed to calm speed-happy motorists.

Surely the health and safety of village residents, especially children on their way to school, should be paramount?

**Michael J Betts**
**Alvechurch**

## Whose house?

**Dear Editor –** Of course, Richard Thorndike is absolutely right in saying the answer to NIMBYism is a compromise somewhere between my letter of September and Peter McHugh's reply in the October issue.

However, I detect a teeny weeny use of inverted snobbery in his attack on Peter and his reference to "ticky-tacky housing . . . from perhaps, his country house". It is me who lives in a country house, not Peter!

**John Impey**
**Alvechurch**

## Hazard warning

**Dear Editor –** This (above) is a scene in Hewell Road, Barnt Green that happens most days . . . someone parking over the crossing with a special surface for blind people, partially sighted and elderly and wheelchair users. Even when it is not blocked, many cars park half or even fully on the pavement so that one has to walk right into the road to see whether one can cross the road. Please can there be a sign saying "NO PARKING" and double lines on that side of the road, plus fines if any one does? One day there will be a serious accident.

**Rachel Banner**
**Barnt Green**

## Am I missing something?

**Dear Editor –** I have to comment on the speed indicator positioned opposite Cofton Church Lane on Kendal End Road, Cofton Hackett.

Why place the sign to inform drivers of their speed approximately 200 metres before it increases to 40mph? Surely the indicator should be on the opposite side of the road informing drivers of their speed as they are entering a 30mph zone. Please tell me I am missing the point.

**Graham Moseley**
**Cofton Hackett**

# Cofton Hackett Parish Council

# Parish Council News: Winter 2023

## A Busy Year

COFTON HACKETT Parish Council has been very busy over the summer and autumn months attending to a number of issues relating to the parish and through this page in *The Village* we wanted to bring you up to date on what has been happening.

I would also like to take this opportunity to wish all residents of Cofton Hackett a very Happy Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Looking to 2024 we are exploring a number of interesting and exciting initiatives for throughout the year and look forward to sharing more with you in the near future via *The Village* magazine and our website which can be viewed at www.coftonhackettparishcouncil.gov.uk

*Cllr Mike Pattison*
*Chairman*

## Biodiversity Initiative

CHPC is committed to improving biodiversity where it can and has recently begun a biodiversity initiative in a small parcel of woodland which it owns.

The initiative will involve rewilding the site and introducing bat boxes, swift boxes, bug hotels and other wildlife habitats, which will be provided by Bromsgrove Men in Sheds.

In developing the initiative, the Council is working with the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust who are advising on which species of native plants should be introduced, with a particular emphasis on providing varieties suitable for night time pollinators, such as moths and bats.

The site holds two oak trees among ash, holly and other native species. It is hoped that in future years, once developed, there can be managed access to the site by school parties and interested residents.

Anyone interested in volunteering to help develop the scheme should contact the Parish Clerk for further details.

## Bilberry Hill Centre

On 19th September a meeting was arranged with representatives of Birmingham City Council Properties team to hear first-hand what plans were being considered for the Bilberry Hills Centre.

The meeting was attended by representatives of the Parish Council, the Lickey Hills Society and local residents. The Birmingham City Council representatives explained that the building was managed by an independent board of trustees and not directly by Birmingham City Council. This means that its future was not affected by the current financial circumstances faced by the Council.

It was reported that there were plans in place to demolish only the rear garage block of the building, which has been subjected to recent anti-social behaviour, to enhance the likelihood of preserving the older tea-room building.

Assurances were given that the trustees are seeking to find a suitable buyer for the building, or to rent it to a suitable tenant, and are keen to ensure its preservation.

## Traffic Safety Initiative

Following the meeting attended by more than 80 residents earlier this year, we have been working closely with the police, County Councillor Adrian Kriss and Councillor Anita Dale to address the situation.

So far, the following has been achieved:

- Begun addressing the speeding issues in conjunction with the police for hot spots including Barnt Green Road, Groveley Lane and Rose Hill.
- Increased Police presence to monitor speeding and take appropriate action.
- Agreed a 'no entry' sign to be installed at the Barnt Green Road end of Ten Ashes Lane.
- The Parish Council has purchased three new speed activated awareness signs for Cofton Hackett: two for Barnt Green Road and one for Groveley Lane. The installation of the signs was completed at the end of November.

## New Benches

The Council has agreed to provide three benches for the play area at Arrow Park and some planters for the Cofton Fields estate. These will be installed in the spring.

## Streetlight LED Conversion

The Parish Council has a policy of converting our older sodium (orange) street lights, as and when they fail, to white LED lamps, which are more energy efficient.

To date approximately 65% of our lights have been converted.

If you see a faulty light, please report it to our Clerk (not the County Council) via email at: clerk@coftonhackettparishcouncil.gov.uk.

## Contact the Clerk

Email:
clerk@coftonhackettparishcouncil.gov.uk
Telephone: 07496 979153



*Any views and opinions on this page are those of Cofton Hackett Parish Council.*

# Swinging into 2024

THOUSANDS of fans travelled to Cheltenham and Forest Green to support the Alvechurch 1st team in their amazing FA Cup run in 2022.

This year the Women's section have also given an inspiring and successful performance.

Now, it's the turn of an Alvechurch juniors team. The Alvechurch Arrows U11s (pictured above with their coaching team) have won the Central Warwickshire Bronze Autumn Cup.

The boys, many of whom have been playing together since they were six, are currently unbeaten champions of their divisional group, having won all six games, scoring 40 goals and only conceding four.

A spokesman for the club said: "This is a community effort, with sponsors from local businesses, including The Crown Inn whose pick-a-team competition raises money for junior football.

"We would also like to thank all the junior section coaches and back room staff; who volunteer their own time to provide training and organise matches for the local children."

■ **For more information about Alvechurch FC junior section, contact: Antony Hasker, Youth Team Lead: Ant.hasker@outlook.com**

BARNT Green youngster, Jake Jeff-Johnston (pictured right), aged 12, has become the U12 British Junior Golf Tour Champion having competed in events all over the UK against 101 other talented juniors.

Jake is now in his third year representing the U14 Worcestershire County Golf squad and part of the winning team in the ten counties U14 championship.

To kick off his 2024 golf season, Jake has qualified to play in the World Championships (U14 category) in Spain in February.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# COLOURING IN BLACKWELL

BLACKWELL Club recently comissioned a colourful, mural by club member, artist and villager Louise Clarke, who grew up in Blackwell and now lives in Barnt Green.

The mural was unveiled to a crowd of members and guests at Blackwell Social Club. The abstract art depicts village landmarks from across Blackwell including St Catherine's Church and the social club.

Louise, who enjoys creating art through a variety of methods including painting, drawing and embroidery, was delighted to work on something which could be enjoyed by the whole community.

She said: "I was so happy to be asked to do the mural. Firstly because it was something I hadn't done before, and also the club is a special place to me; I've been going since I was a child.

"Because a mural is something I hadn't done before, I definitely didn't think it'd take as long as it did! It took a couple of hours to draw out the plan on paper, then four weekends to paint it, plus a little extra time to finish off in the dark where I painted by torch-light!"

The club features towards the centre of the mural, surrounded by church, first school and village stores. Louise also included a view over the Lickey incline to the golf course and Scout centre. The new addition forms part of Blackwell Club plans for celebrating 120 years of village life since being founded in 1904.

Louise Clarke braves the chilly weather to paint.

Louise said: "It was really exciting for me when people would come to the club while I was doing the painting, and they'd recognise the things that I'd painted, or when children would recognise the school that they go to. That, along with meeting new people, was a really special experience – particularly as this was the village I grew up in! I really loved doing the mural from start to finish, and I'd happily do it again. I'm glad that a piece of me and my art will be permanently at the club for many years to come."

**■ You can explore more of Louise's work and buy pieces of your own at: www.etsy.com/shop/itspaintbylouise. Louise has also created Blackwell Christmas cards in the style of the mural which are also available to buy from Blackwell Social Club (pictured above).**

# Little ones' litter-pick success

ALVECHURCH Village Society carried out another successful litter pick in the village.

Well attended by lots of families, the children enjoyed their litter picking session, collecting 12 bags of rubbish from across Alvechurch.

The 2nd Alvechurch rainbows attended a second litter pick in The Meadows. Mariea Clarke, who helped to organise the litter pick said: "We had a wonderful morning and they were so knowledgeable about the environment."

Alvechurch Village Society, would like to invite children and adults to join future litter picks, especially adults to join the children as children aren't able to clear the main roads around Alvechurch.

**A successful litter pick in The Meadows, and some very proud girls.**





# New kids on the block, well...not quite

Property experts **Michelle & Co** lay out their plans for the future and tell how they have made a name for themselves in the village, despite the rise of online estate agents.

MICHELLE & Co Properties are delighted to open their new office at 87a Hewell Road, Barnt Green, opposite Tesco Express.

We aren't new to the village because previously we rented a window from Village Financial, with whom who we have a close affiliation.

We have now taken over the whole office and, after a short time, already feel at home in the village.

Michelle Mehjoo is well known and respected in the Barnt Green and Bromsgrove area, having been in the area for over 22 years.

She started in 2001 in Barnt Green working for a well-known local agent fronting their lettings department and then moved to another local estate agent and ran their lettings department for 13 years until it was sold to a national chain.

That's when Michelle decided to set up on her own as she realised that one industry where the personal service matters was the estate agency business.

The business has since gone from strength to strength and expanded into residential sales in 2018.

The company has never lost its mantra that personal service is still so important in this fast-moving high-tech society that we live in.

We have a great team, both in Sales and Lettings that follow this simple rule.

**On the Barnt Green board: Familiar businesses in the village, where you'll also find Michelle & Co in their new home.**

We are a small company but offer, what we believe to be an excellent service and our Google reviews says it all!

The team at Michelle & Co. go the extra mile and appreciate that selling and buying a property is one of the most stressful things that we have to endure.

We all know that everyone is logging into the property portals such as "Rightmove " and "On the Market" and we have a short time before someone swipes to the next property.

This is why we help with staging properties and have professional photographers to capture the property to its best advantage.

We would love to welcome you and come and have a chat with us regarding your property , whether you are looking to sell it, rent it or just want some advice.

Please pop in and say hello and have a coffee.

**Michelle & Co.**
**87A Hewell Road,**
**Barnt Green B45 8NL**
**01527 306161**

# SUPPORT VILLAGE GROUPS

Pete Nash presents Rachel Rollinson with a cheque.

A VILLAGE store presented The Lounge Community Cafe, Alvechurch, with a cheque to support their work with seniors and their group Friendship Matters.

Pete Nash, the Membership Pioneer for Alvechurch and Rubery Co-operative stores, presented Rachel Rollinson, Community and Youth Co-ordinator for The Lounge, with more than £2,000, which will go towards their senior provision.

The money that is donated to The Lounge is raised through a Co-op scheme: each store supports chosen organisations every year. One per-cent of each Co-op brand purcharse made by Co-op members is donated to the cause of their choosing (chosen via their Co-op account).

"It's a celebration, and also a welcome," Pete said, as Rachel explained that next year, The Lounge was hoping to support their youth provision through the funding.

Pete also urged villagers to become Co-op members and choose to support The Lounge through their purchasing. He said: "It's important for people to support their local store; times are hard and if it goes, it's probably not coming back."

This year, the Co-op is also working with Alvechurch Community Larder to help provide pyjamas to families who may need them.

Pete told *The Village* about the Co-op "Pyjama Party" scheme, and how you can help keep a child warm this winter. You can donate a set of new pyjamas (please no used ones) until 14 December. Just take them to Alvechurch Larder on Thursdays and Fridays and they will be distributed to families who need them.

■ **When you become a Co-op member online, and through your account you can choose a cause in which to donate your money to, with each purchase of Co-op brand goods.**
**For more information, visit: www.coop.co.uk/membership**

# A year of helping

AS *The Village* goes to press, Alvechurch Community Larder passes one year since it opened its doors on 2 December 2022.

At that time the larder helped 22 families, however since then, the larder helps more than 50 families a week from across the parish, and they have engaged with more than 300 families in total. Some of those families are regular visitors, others just occasional, but all are welcome.

Alvechurch Larder came to be, through an idea of Gillian Jones, Maruice Smith and Dave Shoesmith, who were joined shortly afterwards by Roger Wardle. The group spent time researching and visiting other community larders.

Soon four more joined to make up a committee of eight, plus one "volunteer representative". Keith Wiseman, a member of the committee, told *The Village* that when looking at premises, Alvechurch Baptist Church "bent over backwarts to support us throughout the process and still do".

The primary aim of Alvechurch Larder is to reduce food waste (which was also chosen by King Charles III as his Coronation Project), and they are active in the community promoting this message.

However, the larder is also available for those who may be struggling with the cost of living.

Their main suppliers are through the Fareshare scheme, which distributes food to places like the larder. The scheme is linked with many food suppliers, and the larder receives donations from ASDA, Tesco's and Farmfoods in addition to local farmers and businesses.

*The Village* visited the larder one Thursday morning, in time for their weekly delivery from Fareshare, which dropped off, oranges, bananas, parsnips and more. Members of the committee and volunteers also spend their time collecting unwanted food from supermarkets from Bromsgrove, Redditch and into Birmingham.

Alvechurch Larder volunteers prepare the larder for evening customers.

Volunteers collect the delivery from Fareshare to put out in the larder.

What classifies as unwanted by supermarkets, however, appears arbitrary for those in need of food, or those who are keen to reduce their food waste; some goods are approaching their sell-by date, some have superficial damage or an "old" packaging that supermarkets are no longer allowed to stock.

Keith said: "There is virtually no food waste from the larder. Any leftover food is taken to our local 'farm animal recue', Hillfield farm in Blackwell for the animals there."

For £4, families can take away a minimum of £20 worth of food, including fresh vegetables, bread, tins, meats and staples like rice, flour and pasta.

The larder relies on more than 50 volunteers, who donate their time on a rota, to help collect deliveries and set up the larder, and be present to help those who use it.

Alvechurch Larder's committee is now taking steps to expand their help, to support villagers who can't access the larder.

They have been working with community groups and official organisations to identify those who need support to get to the larder, and hope to soon be able to make deliveries to those people.

**Access Alvechurch Community Larder at the Baptist Church on:**
**Thursdays from 8–9pm**
**Fridays from 11am–12.30pm**
For £4 you will receive approximately £20 worth of food to help reduce food waste and the cost of living.

# Charity tree recycling for children

FEE's TREES, based in Cofton Hackett, is once again organising a charity Christmas tree collection and recycling scheme. The service is available for residents of Cofton, Barnt Green, Alvechurch, Hopwood and Bromsgrove areas.

The tree collection last year raised £4,530 for Birmingham Children's Hospital (BCH).

Fee's Trees owner Fiona Edwards (right), who is an Ambassador for BCH, said: "Last year as a result of our fundraising we have purchased two heated cots for the neonatal ward at BCH. These cots will help babies after their surgery to maintain the correct temperature and help their recovery.

"The staff on the unit are over the moon that we chose to support them and their ward. This is also the ward where our daughter Emilia spent some time after she was born."

Money for BCH is raised through people making a donation to have their trees taken away after Christmas.

Fiona added: "So many people love a real Christmas tree but don't want the upheaval of moving it in their own car after the big day. By providing this service we can help them save time and mess.

"To date we have raised more than £87,000 for the hospital in memory of our daughter Emilia, through various fundraising events, and the support of the local community over the years has been phenomenal."

In addition to the tree recycling scheme, Fee and the team of volunteers continue to fundraise throughout the year.

Fee's Trees have once again teamed up with volunteers from LogCo.co and Trinity House Group.

The teams of volunteers will be out collecting trees on Sunday 7 January 2023.

**■ To arrange a collection or to check if your area is included, visit www.justgiving.com/fundraising/bch2023trees or use the QR code**

**(right), make your donation and then text your home address to 07941 936668 or email: bchtreecollection@btinternet.com.**


## Christmas Day

COMMUNITY LUNCH, 1PM

The Ark, Alvechurch

**Do you fancy some company on Christmas Day?**

Whether you live alone, you are a couple or a larger family unit you are invited to join us at The Ark for a Christmas Day Community Lunch.

**MENU**
A tradition Christmas lunch with Turkey or Nut Roast and all the trimmings.

Dessert will be a selection of Christmas treats including cheese and biscuits.

Wine, soft drinks and tea and coffee.

**TRANSPORT**
Would you like to come but need help in getting to The Ark? We can help with this too! Call and speak to us.

**BOOKING**
If you know that you are definitely coming, please book in advance.

If on Christmas Day you would like to come but haven't booked please do come along anyway, there is always plenty to go round.

**COST**
Free. There is no cost

**To book or for more information please speak to Lynda at The Ark 0121 447 7955 admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk**

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Merry Christmas from The Weighbridge Inn Pop in for a pint over the festive period!

Everyone at The Village wishes you a very Merry Christmas including Vinny!

Wishing everyone a safe and healthy Festive season from your Independent District Councillor Rachael Bailes

Merry Christmas from everyone at Beoley Parish Council

Merry Christmas from everyone at Barnt Green Parish Council

Alvechurch Parish Council wishes everyone a very Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all customers, from Coopers Hill Farm

Merry Christmas and a healthy New Year from your Independent District Councillor Alan Bailes

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, from Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council

Merry Christmas from everyone at Amy Greaves School of Dance

Merry Christmas from Independent Parish & District Councillor Charlie Hotham

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all the team at Lunatips Nails & Beauty

# Lights on, Alvechurch

VILLAGES across the area marked the start of the festive season with their community lights switch-ons.

The event organised by Alvechurch Parish Council featured singing, Santa Claus and was accompanied by food and drinks from The Lounge and Gin and Pickles.

Town crier Kevin Ward welcomed the large crowd of villagers who braved sub-zero temperatures to enjoy the singing, hot dogs (from Hot Diggety Dogs) and lovely lights.

He then introduced the choirs, Alvechurch Community Choir and a choir from Crown Meadow First School, who carried colourful lanterns.

Both gave excellent performances of Christmas carols and popular festive songs to get everyone feeling jolly.

Plenty of the crowd were clapping, singing and, in some cases, dancing along.

This year, the choirs performed in front of the village tree, a change of location from last year, which was in front of The Lounge. In a more open location, the singing could be enjoyed and heard by all.

The Alvechurch Christmas tree lights were switched on by none other than Santa himself, who also entertained the crowd and delighted youngsters, handing out treats.

Once the tree was lit, much of the crowd made their way to the Baptist Church, where there were crafts, and more singing from Alvechurch Community Choir. The church also distributed hot drinks for people to warm chilly (or, more accurately, freezing) hands.

Despite the extra chilly start to December, a fantastic time was had by all, together on The Square, as Christmas tunes were belted out by young, old and everyone in between.

**Festive fun:** Santa greets two young villagers.

**Above:** Crown Meadow First School pupils belt out the festive tunes to the crowd.
**Left:** Bromsgrove Town Crier Kevin Ward, opens the event.

**Alvechurch Community Choir:** Performing a selection of carols.

**Excitement builds:** Crown Meadow choir prepares to perform their range of festive songs, complete with colourful lanterns.

**Above:** Young villagers dance along to the festive tunes.

**Above left:** Families enjoy the carols.
**Above Right:** The Rev Gail Rogers sparkles in the Baptist Church.
**Below:** Members of the Parish Council, Town Crier, and volunteers preparing for the event.

**Above:** Hello, Santa Claus!
**Right:** Alvechurch Community Choir entertain the crowd.
**Below:** Singing their hearts out, the Crown Meadow choir delight with festive songs.

**No age limit:** A seat on Santa's knee.

Christmas elves 'Sue and Ed' with Alfie the cockerpoo.

# Barnt Green lights up

VILLAGERS crowded into Barnt Green's Millennium Park for the arrival of Santa and the big lights switch-on, keeping warm with hot drinks from Village Vineyard and entertained by Arrow Valley Brass Band before Santa and his helper "plunged" on the lights.

Millennium Park fills up (above) before the switch-on performed by Santa and his helper (right).

Santa mingles with the crowd, while parish chairman Robert Cholmondeley tests out the plunger ready for the big switch-on (right)

Festive joy spreads around the village (above) as Barnt Green's custom lights pop back on for another year (right).

# Rowney Green gets festive

SANTA and his helpers brought a wave of warmth to Rowney Green, greeting the children and then enjoying their festive singing, watched by the village adults in the Village Hall.

*Pictures by* Wendy and Mark Easter

# VILLAGES REMEMBER

SUNDAY 12 November dawned grey and drizzly but, undeterred, the Alvechurch community gathered in large numbers to remember the Parish's fallen soldiers.

St Laurence Church held a special service of remembrance, dedicated to remembering those service-people.

The entrance to the church was adorned with 750 bright red, knitted poppies, made by people in the community as a beautiful tribute to remember those who died, not just in World War I and World War II, but in all the wars since.

The church service congregation then processed to the village green, led by Chris Lamb playing the bagpipes.

At the green, they joined the growing crowd for a Remembrance service and moment of silence.

Pupils from Crown Meadow First School and Alvechurch Middle School read the names of fallen service-people and acknowledged their sacrifice by laying crosses of remembrance on the green.

Young people from local Scouts, Rainbows, Brownies and Guides groups also took part in the service, and lowered their flags in tribute to the fallen.

Representatives from the community, including district and parish councillors, local police, Alvechurch Football Club and village societies and institutions laid wreaths on the lawn.

Two minutes of silence at 11am, accompanied by a traditional bugler to mark the moment.

A rendition of the National Anthem *God Save The King* was performed to close the service.

This year saw one of the largest crowds for a village Remembrance service to date in the village, with many commenting on the sense of community felt in the crowd.

The communal service was a collaborative event, organised by Alvechurch Services Association, Alvechurch Parish Council and St Laurence church, who all aimed to bring villagers together to remember.

**Above:** Groups of Guides, Brownies, Rainbows and Scouts raise their flags.

**Above:** Knitted poppies adorn the entrance to St Laurence

Brett Shepherd, who is part of Alvechurch Services Association has been instrumental in the development of the service on the green, and bringing together more service-people and representatives from the community .

Brett, who served in the Army in the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment between 1998-2008, and was a Captain when he left, said he was "really pleased with the turn-out on the green this year, particularly considering the wet weather".

Following the remembrance event in 2021, Brett has been working to develop a meaningful Remembrance event for Alvechurch, give villagers the opportunity to come together, and honour the service-people from the area.

The services held in 2022 and 2023 have seen some of the largest crowds at the village green, and involving groups from across the parish.

**Clockwise from above:** St Laurence Church flies the flag of St George; District and parish councillors join the service on Alvechurch Village Green; a group of Alvechurch Middle School pupils pay their respects; Crown Meadow pupils join in the singing and prayers; showing support and respect in uniform; Brett Shepherd stands in front of the memorial; villagers brave the rain to gather on Bear Hill; the two minutes silence is marked by a bugler.

*continues overleaf*

# In memory 80 years on

WREATHS were laid in Rowney Green on Armistice Day to commemorate the 80th anniversary of a Wellington bomber crash nearby.

A Canadian maple, dedicated in 2007 to the memory of five Canadian airmen lost in the crash on November 9 1943, was the focus of the ceremony organised by the Rowney Green Association and Alvechurch Services Association.

Above (from left): Coun Steve Hornsby, of Alvechurch Parish Council, John Cypher and Andy Dunkers, of Rowney Green Association, Coun Alan Bailes, of Bromsgrove District Council and Brett Shepherd, of Alvechurch Services Association. Below: Time to reflect.

Left: Arthur Pearsall, of the then Alvechurch Ex-Services Association, flanked by Canadian representatives, during the dedication in 2007 of the maple tree to the memory of the airmen lost in the crash in Lower Rowney Green.

DESPITE A very damp morning, there was a larger crowd than usual gathered at the Memorial in Lickey on Remembrance Sunday. Taking the service (left) was the Rev Sheri Gidney, vicar of Holy Trinity, along with the new curate Louise Beasley. Lickey & Blackwell Parish Council was represented by chairman Coun Bakul Kumar, who read out the names of the fallen.

# Help to choose a beautiful garden

THE luxurious retirement village, Mount Battenhall in Worcester are delighted to be partnering with local company, *Instant Scenery*, winner of a BALI National Landscape Award.

Instant Scenery will be designing and installing a show garden to enhance roof terraces and balconies at the retirement village. *The Village* readers will have the opportunity decide on the final design to be installed.

The project will be completed in early 2024 and include details inspired by historical artifacts and traditional materials from Worcestershire.

Three fantastic designs have been created by Instant Scenery following a brief delivered by Sarah Harper, Sales and Marketing Manager at Enterprise Retirement Living (ERL). Sarah said: "Dan at Instant Scenery and his team have cared and nurtured the planting areas and manicured the 6.5 acres of grounds at our Grade II* listed Mount Battenhall. They have a culture of respect for tradition and heritage and they were the perfect partner to design and install our show garden."

Inspiration for the show garden designs reflects the bricks used from the oldest part of the house, manufactured by Coalbrookdale Co Ltd in Lightmore, Shropshire.

Soft landscaping within each design includes espalier fruit trees, black pear and a Worcester cox, emblematic of Worcester.

Contemporary lighting further enhance the gardens to offer alfresco dining and evening entertainment areas. The designs are on display at Mount Battenhall in the Atrium and Astley Villa.

ERL invites you to enter the competition and choose which of the designs should be brought to life.

The competition will run until

22 December. A winner will be announced on Mount Battenhall's Facebook and Instagram pages and via the ERL website www.erl.uk.com/retirement-villages/mount-battenhall/news/competition-time-be-involved-in-our-new-rooftop-garden-design.

The chosen design will be installed on the roof terrace of a penthouse suite at Mount Battenhall during January 2024.

The winner of the competition will receive a bottle of local Hussingtree Blended, Mount Battenhall Gin.

To view the designs, enter the competition, or to see the show garden big reveal, you are invited to register by contacting the sales team on 01905 347121 or emailing sales@mountbattenhall.co.uk.

Alvechurch Rangers and Guides enjoyed a visit from Aelfgythe Morris dancers at one of their meetings. Alvechurch Guides have been working towards their fitness badge, and looking at ways to keep fit physically and mentally. As part of the fitness badge, the Morris side came and ran an evening session, showcasing some of their dancing and also taught the girls some dances and about the history of Morris dancing. Brilliant fun was had by all.

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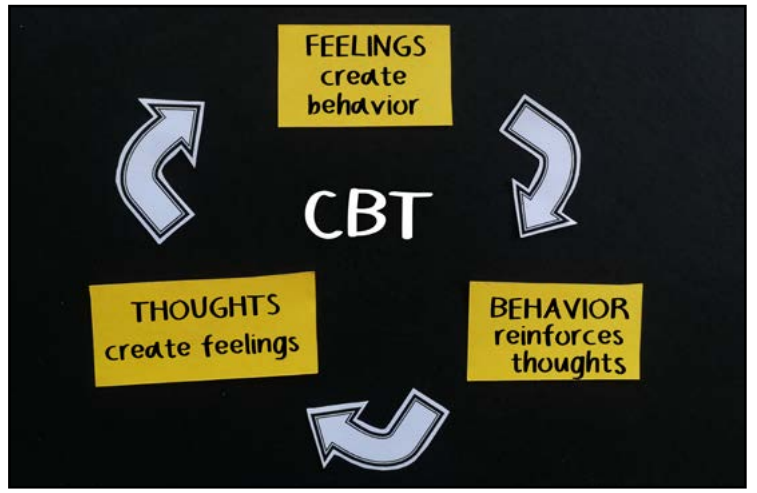
# Seasonal stress strategies

Dr Heidi Kerr and Dr Vicky Hobbs, from **VHK Women's Health Clinic**, discuss triggers of stress and anxiety, and how you can work to combat these this festive season.

VHK WOMENS HEALTH




**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy: A useful tool to help with stress.** *Image: Shutterstock.*

AS we head towards Christmas, many of us may recognise feelings of stress or overwhelm gradually developing and impacting on the daily enjoyment of life.

Anxiety and stress are common in people of all ages but at this time of year triggers can be related to the list of jobs to do, Christmas functions to attend and the more-than-likely risk of coughs, colds or viral illness affecting oneself or our families.

Noticing little changes to our mental wellbeing and building in good self-care routines can have a very positive impact and be used in everyday life.

One evidence-based approach is the use of cognitive behavioural therapy, which is a practical non-medical way of offering strategies to manage symptoms of stress and anxiety.

A stress reaction is the body's response to a perceived or real threat – it is a protective mechanism used by the body which releases the hormone adrenaline and puts us on high alert. The blood supply to the muscles increases, our breathing quickens to increase the oxygen supply and our muscles tense – ready for action.

Whilst this response is critical for life-threatening situations, for most of us it is not required for day-to-day small stresses – however if this stress response is constantly activated it can affect our health and wellbeing and this is when we need to take action.

Equally, anxiety which is a collection of symptoms, including feelings of unease, worry or fear, is also a natural response to threatening situations, but can escalate and be hard to control when we are suffering with high levels of stress.

At VHK Women's Health clinic we are aware that symptoms of menopause can add to the stress response – poor sleep, fluctuation of mood and brain fog can all trigger persistent low-level stresses that build to cause more significant problems.

Managing menopausal symptoms is key to supporting women both physically and mentally.

At VHK Women's Health we offer women time to explore symptoms, create bespoke management plans and prescribe all forms of HRT. We would also recommend the use of self-care and in particular cognitive behavioural therapy.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy focuses on the link between physical symptoms, thoughts, feelings and behaviour because how we think about a particular situation then affects how we feel and then respond.

If we manage how we respond to our thoughts we can influence how our body reacts leading to a calmer and more positive outcome.

Let's think about how we might usually respond to a stressful trigger, it might be a hot flush in a work meeting or a difficult conversation with a colleague or relative.

This may usually trigger us to avoid a situation, over-work or turn to food or alcohol for support. Instead consider what makes you feel calm or content and try to build this into your day for a short time to help you relax and reduce your overall stress levels.

In an acutely stressful situation using paced breathing can bring the heart rate down and control the physical symptoms you are experiencing – with relaxed shoulders take a few controlled breaths from the lower abdomen and focus on breathing in and out counting to four or five – it has an instant calming effect and when done regularly reduces symptoms of anxiety.

So, over this festive period when stress levels rise turn to paced breathing and a CBT approach to help manage your stress levels and have a very Merry Christmas!

**We would love to see you at VHK Women's Health Clinic. We can offer a full assessment and holistic approach to every woman.**
**To make an appointment with VHK Women's Health Clinic please visit: www.vhkwomenshealth.com**

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## Meet the Team

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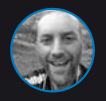
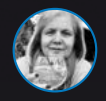


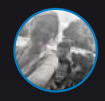
**Martin Pryor**
Financial Planner & Adviser

Business & Finance degree to Graduate training course at Prudential, leading to becoming a qualified independent financial adviser in 1996 and setting up PPM Financial Planning in 2006.



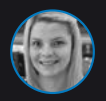
**Nicky Lowndes**
General Manager

Nicky has been at PPM Financial Planning since the very beginning in 2006 bringing with her 19 years of banking experience with HSBC.



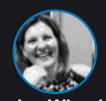
**Laura Siddall**
Financial Planner & Adviser

Laura has 19 years of industry experience. Her role is to construct financial plans for clients using our cash flow modelling software, helping deliver true financial planning.



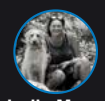
**Laura Daniels**
Mortgage Adviser

Laura joined in 2016, providing admin support whilst completing training to become our qualified mortgage broker.



**Louise Wheeler**
Paraplanner

Louise Joined PPM in September 2021, bringing with her 8 years of paraplanning experience and 13 years working within financial services.



**Jodie Morey**
Office Administrator

Jodie joined PPM from an accountancy background and performs a variety of tasks in the day to day running of the business.

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# What's changed now?

Martin Pryor discusses the highlights from the Autumn Statement, and how changes affect you.

THE Autumn Statement, delivered against the backdrop of an impending election, showcases a series of fiscal measures aimed at appealing to the public.

Notably, the reduction in the standard rate of employee National Insurance and the decline in inflation from a peak of 11% to 4.6% are expected to dominate headlines. While tax adjustments take centre stage, changes to pensions and ISAs, though perceived as incremental, warrant attention.

**ISA Reforms (Effective April 2024):**

Starting April 2024, significant changes to Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs) will take effect, aiming to enhance flexibility and accessibility.

Noteworthy reforms include the allowance for multiple ISA subscriptions of the same type within a tax year, partial transfers between ISAs, and the elimination of annual reapplication requirements.

The expansion of Innovative Finance ISAs to include certain investments, allowance for fractional shares, and the harmonization of the minimum age for adult ISAs to 18 are among the positive adjustments.

Additionally, the government plans to digitalize the ISA reporting system, fostering investor support tools.

**Pension Overhaul (Effective April 2024):**

The Autumn Finance Bill 2023 will legislate to eliminate the Lifetime Allowance, bringing clarity to the taxation of lump sums, lump sum death benefits, protections, and the treatment of overseas pensions. A notable proposal is the consideration of a "pot for life", allowing individuals to direct automatic enrolment contributions to a scheme of their choice.

However, concerns linger over public engagement and the potential IT costs associated with this initiative. A multiple default consolidator model is suggested for eligible pension pots under £1,000, with details yet to be unveiled.

Consultations on the extended role of collective defined contribution (CDC) schemes are also on the horizon.

**National Insurance Contributions (NICs) Adjustments:**

Effective January 6 2024, the main rate of Class 1 employee NICs will be reduced from 12% to 10%, benefitting 27 million workers. The self-employed will witness a reduction in the main rate of Class 4 NICs from 9% to 8% starting April 6, 2024.

Class 2 self-employed NICs will be abolished for those with profits over £12,570, with access to contributory benefits maintained.

The freezing of the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) and Small Profits Threshold (SPT) at 2023-24 levels in 2024-25, along with the extension of Employer NICs relief for veterans, are integral components of the NICs adjustments.

**Married Couple's Allowance, Blind Person's Allowance, and National Living Wage:**

The Blind Person's Allowance (BPA) and Married Couple's Allowance (MCA) will be uprated by 6.7% in 2024-25, with the BPA valued at £3,070 and the MCA ranging from £4,280 to £11,080. The National Living Wage (NLW) will see a 9.8% increase to £11.44 from April 1, 2024, benefiting over 2.7 million low-paid workers, and lowering the age threshold from 23 to 21.

**Business Tax and Support Measures:**

Following the introduction of full expensing for qualifying plant and machinery investment in the Spring Budget, the government has decided to make this change permanent, estimated to benefit businesses by over £10 billion annually.

A business rates support package worth £4.3 billion over the next five years has been unveiled to aid small businesses and the high street, with a frozen small business multiplier and extended Retail, Hospitality, and Leisure (RHL) relief.

Despite 110 announcements there were thankfully no shocks or unwelcome surprises. Instead the Autumn Statement for 2023 presents a mix of tax cuts, pension adjustments, and business support measures with a clear focus on public appeal.

The reduction in National Insurance rates, ISA reforms, and changes to pension regulations reflect the government's commitment to economic recovery and individual financial empowerment. As political and economic landscapes evolve, these measures are poised to shape the fiscal narrative in the lead-up to the forthcoming election.

Budgets and statements always serve as a good reminder how rules can change.

The benefit of having a financial planner is that any changes that make a difference to your financial plan will be identified and applied to your plan to determine whether you are better or worse off as a result of announced changes.

**Martin Pryor**
***Lifestyle Financial Planner***
*For more information, please contact us*
***Tel: 07961 162818***
***martinpryor@ppmfinancialplanning.com***
***www.ppmfinancialplanning.com***

*The Financial Conduct Authority does not regulate Tax Planning This article should not be regarded as personal advice. You should seek independent financial advice to apply these theories to your circumstances.*

# THINKING OF MOVING?

**Mark Meads** tells us how **Village Financial** will support all of their clients with moves and mortgages in the New Year.

**Mark Meads (right), is here to help make sure you are on the right path with your mortgage.**

AS we take some time out and celebrate the Christmas season, perhaps your thoughts are turning to your plans for the new year?

After a turbulent year in the mortgage market, with rates increasing, we are thankfully now seeing the market settle and many lenders are starting to reduce their fixed-rate offerings.

At Village Financial we can support you in all your mortgage needs, whether it be your first home, a new move, re-mortgaging or even your buy-to-let mortgages. We are able to advise on mortgages for all adults of any age and circumstance.

Our promise to you is that we will make the process easier, we will liaise with your estate agents and lawyers as needed, we will keep you updated as your mortgage process progresses, we will help you every step of the way.

And rest assured, once you become a client of ours we will be there every time your existing deal matures, we will contact you well in advance and ensure you get the right deal for your circumstances, at that point in your life.

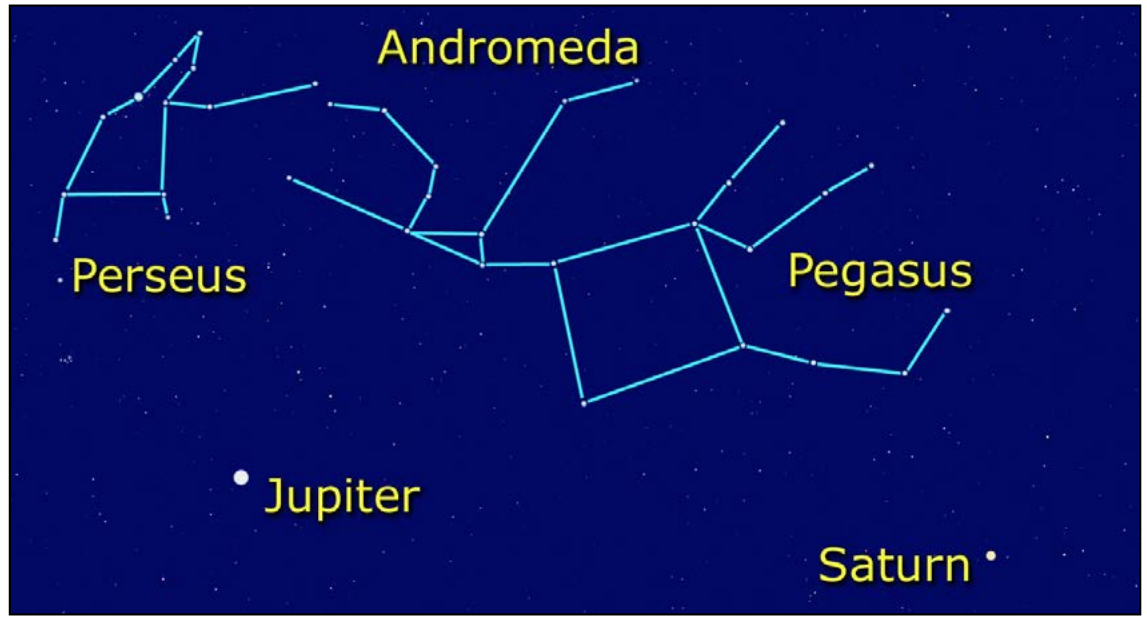
We would like to take this opportunity to wish a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all!

**If you would like an initial discussion to see how we can help, please contact us on: 0121 445 1227.**
**Or contact us through our website: www.villagefinancial.co.uk using the QR code**

*Your home may be repossessed if you do not keep up repayments on your mortgage*








**A full Christmas sky: Spot constellations of Pegasus and Perseus.**

# Stars, Saturn and Santa

Amateur astronomer **Brian Watkiss** peers into the *Village* night sky.

DECEMBER, when the days seem so short and darkness seems to prevail. We have news that some scientists have predicted the existence of dark stars. They would consist entirely of dark matter and, perhaps unsurprisingly, no one has ever been able to see one. Maybe they need to get out more.

Anyway, winter is with us following the Solstice on the 22nd December but at least the hours of daylight will then start to increase.

Looking southwards from about 6.30pm, the brightest object in the sky is still that dazzler of a planet, Jupiter. It will be dominating the early evening sky for a few months yet.

Saturn is still visible too but getting closer to the horizon now as we start to swing around the Sun and we will lose sight of it towards the end of January. So, let's find this elusive, multi-ringed planet while we can. Looking up from Jupiter and a little to the right, you should be able to find a large square of stars. This is the main body of Pegasus, that flying horse figure of Greek mythology. He's upside down so his head springs from the bottom right corner and his front legs from the top right.

The stars streaming out from the top left corner aren't his rear legs but a different constellation called Andromeda, who was the unfortunate princess chained to a rock in the sea for being beautiful.

Don't worry, she was rescued by Perseus, also featured in the sky at the end of Andromeda's chain of stars.

Look up and left from Jupiter and you may see a sort of Giraffe shape with the bright star, Mirfak at its centre. This is Perseus. A veritable soap opera in the sky!

Now where was I?

Ah yes, Saturn. Return to Pegasus and follow the line of the right hand side of the square down to a similar height as Jupiter and just a little to the right is Saturn, looking like one of the brighter stars. Still a wonderful sight in a telescope.

We also have an excellent meteor shower mid-December. This is the Geminids and it peaks between the 13th and 15th of the month so if you are out and about during the hours of darkness, keep half an eye on the sky for the odd shooting star.

It is especially good this year as the Moon will be a mere thin crescent at this time but watch it grow day by day. It swings by Saturn on the 17th and Jupiter on the 22nd.

A second meteor shower, the Ursids, peaks on this date too.

Now I know that December the 25th is a special day for a lot of people and NORAD, the US and Canada's agency that tracks anything flying in their airspace, keeps a special watch at this time.

So, go to www.noradsanta.org on the evening of the 24th to see what's happening in the sky during the following 24 hours.

Have a good one!

# WILL IT BE ALL WHITE?

Alvechurch amateur weatherman **Phil Thomas** records the changes.

FOLLOWING the very wet weather in October, which saw 178.2mm total rainfall, 214% of the monthly average, November was quite a changeable month.

Temperatures were above normal for most of the month, but the weather turned much colder towards the end, with night-time temperatures falling below freezing.

Rainfall however remained around the average, at 70.7mm, about 84% of what we would expect for this time of year.

The change and turn to much colder weather was the result of a change in weather pattern. A high pressure area began to block the weather off the Atlantic, allowing a much colder airstream from the North.

**The Outlook**

AS we approach the festive season, the weather is likely to remain cold at first going into December, with wintery showers expected in places, especially in the East.

Some parts of the South and West may become fine and dry for a time, and there is an increasing chance of milder more changeable weather as time progresses.

Conditions are likely to be changeable into December and the Christmas period, with wetter and windier conditions than average also expected, particularly in the West and North-West.

Temperatures are likely to be near or above average overall in December, however this doesn't rule out some spells of cold weather and associated wintery hazards – so take care out and about, especially over the busy festive period!

So if you're hoping for a white Christmas . . . well, you never know!

**Mist over the hills:** A beautiful but chilly morning.

**Above:** Ducks swim through the autumn leaves.

**Above:** Fungi sprouts from beneath fallen leaves.

**October 2023**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Max | 15.6C | 1.3C above average |
| Mean Min | 8.4C | 1.3C above average |
| Mean | 12.0C | 1.3C above average |
| Rainfall | 178.2mm | 214% of average |
| Sunshine | 86.7hrs | 84% of average |

**November 2023 (to 29th)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Max | 10.9C | 0.8C above average |
| Mean Min | 4.6C | 0.4C above average |
| Mean | 7.7C | 0.6C above average |
| Rainfall | 70.7mm | 83% of average |
| Sunshine | 71.9hrs | 1% of average |

More information at ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com*** You can see an improved HD weather-cam, updated at one-minute intervals, at: ***www.alvechurchweather.metsite.com/webcam_alvechurch.php***

A visitor checks out hogweed seeds.

# SEASON OF GIVING

**Mary Green** tells us about the lessons she has learned recently from young people's love of nature and our environment.

I'VE had some nice reactions to my last article about the little ridge and Old Orchard in Barnt Green. Some people have tried it for the first time and loved it. Others have told me their family names for the ridge. One was "the Alps" and the other one "the Pine Ogre's Wood" (which I think is from the Rupert books). I still don't know much about it.

It wasn't a great autumn for leaf colour. Many of the trees just went dirty green and dropped their leaves, though some eventually did turn gold and red very late. This is not good. Losing the green means the trees are taking nutrients back down to their roots for winter, so the beautiful colours for us are also a sign of healthy trees.

I have benefited from gifts recently which have helped me in my knowledge of the natural world. One was really a gift to my sister from her son, but it was for two people so I went too. It was a foraging day in the Lake District. We were both a little scepti-

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**Black waxcap fungus.**

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cal beforehand as there is some rather superficial stuff written about foraging, and I'm not always sure it's good to encourage large numbers of people to do it in our nature-depleted land. But it turned out to be a good experience.

The best thing was that our leader, Ellie, was a young woman with an intimate knowledge of the wildlife around her – the sort that comes from experience, not from Google!

I worry sometimes that this kind of knowledge may die out when we oldies do, so it's really good to see the contrary.

In autumn, a lot of the green plants we can eat have gone too tough or died down, but there are usually fruits and fungi, and this is what she concentrated on (eating foraged meat and fish is also possible – and even insects in other culture – but was not included here).

Unfortunately it was a lean year for fungi, as round here when I led my biodiversity walks round what should have been a fungi-rich woodland.

She wasn't quite sure why either, as the warm damp weather seemed perfect for fruiting bodies of fungi to pop up. It may be that some colder nights were needed, or something in the trees they live on and alongside wasn't right for them. I suspect it is related to the trees not behaving normally, as grassland fungi have been plentiful – especially on some of the lawns in Alvechurch!

We did find fungi, some small

**Eye catching yellow: Chicken of the woods fungus.**

**Meadow fungi: Found on Alvechurch lawns.**

and obscure, some poisonous and a few edible. She was able to show us how she knew them by touch and smell as well as sight. This is very important, as is where exactly they grow.

Identifying fungi is one of the things an app or even a good book may not help with!

We found shining ink caps and common ink caps, which I didn't know though I know shaggy ink caps.

We saw a perfect hoof fungus on a tree, a big turkey tail bracket fungus, tiny bonnet fungi and one small edible bolete. We didn't find enough to pick for lunch!

We did find edible leaves which we all helped pick as they were common.

**Jelly-ear fungus.**

One was yarrow, which grows all over the verges round here, flowering in late summer and autumn. The leaves and flowers smell lovely and it is an ancient herb which also tastes delicious with fungi.

We found lots of wood sorrel leaves. This isn't common here as it likes more acid soils but is present in some of our ancient woodland. It's sharp-tasting and should only be eaten in small amounts as it is a bit laxative.

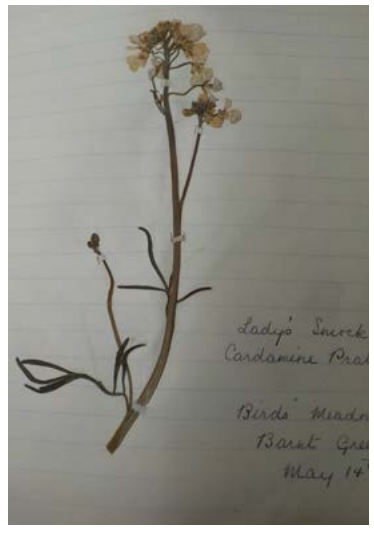
There were plenty of fruits, seeds, nuts and berries for us to find, and she showed us poisonous and edible ones.

I was pleased with how she showed people hogweed seeds, which I have dried and ground for spices before. She got us to rub them between our fingers and said, "that smells like Christmas!". It did – orangey and spicy. Around us also were sweet chestnuts, walnuts and apples.

At the end of the walk, she and her mother cooked us a foraged meal in the woods, getting us to help with chopping and stirring.

She had to use some fungi she'd picked before and dried, and also included pickles, jams and drinks she had made from earlier foraging. Among the fungi we ate were dryad's saddle and chicken of the woods. The former I've seen along the canal on an old ash tree, the latter on a dead trees on Cooper's Hill. Delicious!

Interestingly, I have a slightly unusual diet due to medical conditions, and don't eat refined sugar or other refined carbohydrates. But I can eat anything that we can forage here in this country.



**Left: Dried Lady's Smock and notes, taken from Anne Bason's diary, Right: A present-day photograph of Lady's Smock.**

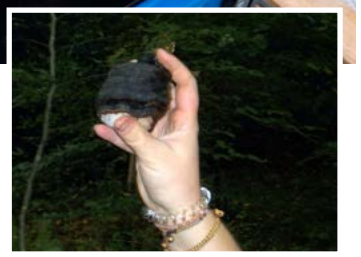
**Cooking wild fungi: A delicious foraged meal.**

There have been studies of the few remaining communities that live largely from foraging, and they have unusually good gut health and absence of diabetes.

I am still undecided about foraging. This course was a really good way of getting people – especially younger people – interested in the natural world and closely observing it with all their senses.

But I'm reluctant to encourage people to collect wild food unless it is in very small quantities from somewhere it is abundant, and of course only where you have permission.

The other gift I've had recently



**Identifying hoof fungus.**

was totally unexpected. I was asked if I'd like to look after a book belonging to the Alvechurch Historical Society – they're short of storage space.

It is a book of pressed flowers and it's nearly a century old, hand-made in 1928 by a girl called Anne Bason of Barnt Green for a Girl Guides badge.

I would love to know who she was, if anyone remembers her. A few of the flowers are the worse for wear, but many are still recognisable, which amazed me.

Every flower has the common and Latin name, a date and place. The names show a superb knowledge of botany for a teenage girl.

Perhaps this was not uncommon then – it's not long after the Edwardian period when "country ladies" often drew and described wild flowers.

My own mother (who must have been about the same age as Anne) was very interested in botany, which was taught in schools then. She wanted to study it but wasn't allowed to go to university, being a girl. However, she did teacher training in Birmingham, and told

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me she used to go over and sit in the back of the University botany lectures and listen in!

Anne's diary runs from April to July and includes 149 different species (one full year when I counted, I found 359 different species flowering). They are familiar to me, but not found in the same places as we could now. For example, she found a handsome plant called twayblade alongside the canal in Alvechurch. Nowadays I can only find this in Eades Meadow where the old flowering patterns have been preserved. However, orchids do occasionally pup up along the canal and I suspect there used to be far more before the banks were regularly mowed.

The canal was a good source for Anne – of course it was still being used for carrying some cargo in 1928 (Cadbury's in particular) and wasn't seen as a leisure place, so the banks were left alone.

Another flower she found, lady's smock, is still common along the canal and in the Wiggins meadows, and even crops up in the village verges when they aren't mown. Anne found several flowers in "fields on Snake Lane" – no longer there.

Interesting to note there were meadows here a hundred years ago, and meadow lowers and fungi still appear in the lawns and verges nearby. She found many on Cooper's Hill, which still has good trees and hedges, but the verges no longer carry many wild flowers – though the road layout may have been different in those days.

"Birds meadow" in Barnt Green was a rich source of flowers, and I don't know where that was. She found betony there, a lovely ancient herb that has become rare in these parts.

Her most fruitful area though is around the edges of the Lickeys, where there is still a variety of soil types and habitats with good biodiversity.

I've learnt a lot from these two young people, one here and now, and one long dead.

The gifts I would give to people if I could are curiosity about the natural world and a belief that we can help to keep it alive and well.

Detailed knowledge of how plants and animals work together can lead to us acting for them instead of against – and it's one of the aspects of the environment where we can genuinely make an impact.

In a small local way, we can create better habitats and reverse the decline in biodiversity here.

What a Christmas present that would be!

■ **Here's a poem (right) I wrote recently for a Withybed Poets meeting on All Saints day.**

**Below:** Twayblade, taken from Anne Bason's diary in 1928.
**Right:** Present-day Twayblade, which can be found in Eades Meadow.

## *All Saints*

It is the day of the dead, as if we needed
A special day for them. They are all around.
But on this day the veil is thin between the worlds
Lovers return to lovers, to leave at cockcrow
The faces of victims rise up before their killers
Saints forgive their torturers, and unborn babies cry.
The day is not concerned with hollowed pumpkins
Or cobwebbed suburban hedges. It is halfway
Between equinox and solstice, pivot of coming dark.
We light fires and candles and shoot foolish fireworks
Telling ourselves that we will live forever
But knowing in our bones that we will lose our flesh
As trees their leaves, and go into the ground.
It is a feast day though, with cakes and ale
Because it says we live in more than just
Our little fragile selves. We form a part
Of a web of souls and matter stretching out
Through time and space and overpassing both.
My spirit is in the pumpkins and the stars
My bones will grow back into fertile earth.
It is the day of the dead, as every day.





# The anonymous birder

*How to enjoy village birdlife*

# MERRY CHRISTMAS TO OWL!

WHO doesn't like a nice December evening walk after dinner or failing that, popping into the garden wrapped up with a hot drink or something stronger to see what you can hear?

On a still night you may be able to hear the thin "seep" of redwings as they fly overhead or the more familiar call of a tawny owl. Although numbers may have fallen for these, mysterious but ubiquitous birds, I hear them regularly in the local suburban streets and gardens.

I recently had my best sighting of two owls silhouetted against the twilight sky sitting on next-door's chimney pots. As woodland becomes more scarce they can easily make a living in residential areas.

**A tawny owl, listening out for prey.**
*Image taken by* ***Andy Borton****.*

Part of this success is due to their very unfussy eating habits. They'll eat most things they can get their talons on, flying or otherwise; including fish, frog spawn, bats, even worms can make up a significant part of their diet but a rodent would be a treat.

Well, with that fantastic night vision… mmm, not really.

Their eyes are not particularly better than ours for night vision but their hearing is a different matter. Like barn owls their ears are slightly offset and their disc-like face feathers act as a sound funnel like cupping your ears, which would be difficult to do whilst flying, hence the classic owl "look".

With super sensitive hearing they can assess the nature and exact position of their of the prey but need calm, dry conditions to hunt.

They are also long-lived, up to 20 years, and get to know their territory like the back of their wing. If you find an owl pellet you could, if you really wanted, take it home and investigate it for the indigestible parts of their prey. Going out in the dark, listening for spooky noises and looking through owl poo, what kid wouldn't love that?

Owls take good care of their owlets for a few months before they become the equivalent of teenagers, when the parent birds get fed up with them and kick them out in the autumn to find their own territories.

As we've discussed many times before, song or calls are a key way birds announce their presence and define their borders. I've heard "adolescent" owls attempting to make an impression with the high pitched hooting of a voice breaking teenager.

By the spring, they might not sound like Barry White but will have developed a respectably resonant "to whit, tu whoo." It is falsely thought that the males use one part of the call to be answered by the females. This isn't the case, with both genders using both calls for pairing up, territory marking and contact in the dark. I most often hear an additional emphatic "ke-wick, ke-wick" contact or warning call.

Although we are unlikely to see a tawny in daylight, look out for a commotion in the hedgerow because if a tawny is found roosting by other birds they will go beserk until the owl gets fed up and either tries to catch one or flies off.

"Mobbing", as it is known, will also happen to birds of prey, which is often a good way of initially spotting them. There is a theory that, among other things, it teaches inexperienced birds which ones to stay away from.

**TWITCHING NEWS**

If you read the October column you may be interested to know it was a bumper autumn for the twitching community with the series of Atlantic storms bringing in some "megas"'to our shores.

A Pembrokeshire ornithologist spotted two unusual birds which were identified as Canada and magnolia warblers, both first records for the UK mainland, thus "megas".

As if that wasn't enough a Cape May warbler (another North American bird) was spotted on the migration hotspot of Scilly, a first for England and only third time in the UK. Described by the birding press as two of the most memorable days in British and Irish birding!

Some birders and twitchers enjoy the tradition of a "big day" on Jan 1st, seeing how many birds species they can see or hear on that day to kick start their year list. Maybe something to consider over the holidays?

Merry Christmas and a happy birding new year to all readers. **JL**

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# A winter well spent

Garden designer **Lindsay Stanton,** tells us what you can expect from your garden and its visitors over winter. Learn how best to take care of your garden, and what jobs you can get started on now in preparation for spring.

*continues overleaf*

*Fom previous page*

AS we head toward midwinter, there still remain some essential jobs to bear in mind before we are ready to let the garden take a much-needed breather.

Warm, wet and windy has been the weather mantra for 2023. Mild wet weather has enabled our plants and trees to produce an abundance of hips, haws, berries and seeds which nourish the birds and brighten our gardens through the winter.

Many of our flowers and shrubs have grown considerably taller than in previous years.

The winds have brought down masses of brilliantly coloured autumn leaves which can be used as a mulch to protect any bare patches of soil from the excesses of the weather (remember not to smother plants ). The rest can be turned into precious leaf mould.

## WINTER ESSENTIALS

December weather can be mild at times, enabling essential outdoor jobs to be completed:

■ Time to plant bare root fruit bushes, trees, roses and hedging.

■ Protect outdoor potted plants by grouping them together near the house (remove saucers so they don't stand in water).

This makes it easier to drape with horticultural fleece during the worst spells of weather.

■ Bring more tender specimens – salvias, penstemons, etc into a greenhouse or conservatory and keep them only lightly watered. Fuchsias, dahlias and cannas don't need light in the winter so can be safely stored in a shed or garage.

■ Winter-prune apple and pear trees, currant and gooseberry bushes and raspberry canes (but not cherry and plum trees ). Spray peach trees against leaf curl.

■ Prune and train grape vines, Boston Ivy, wisteria and climbing roses.

■ Trim the top growth from bush roses to prevent wind rock and stake trees securely.

**Found in Lindsay's garden:** Rose hips and teasels.

■ Take hardwood cuttings of currants and gooseberries over the season. Force rhubarb for tender early stems.

■ Lawn care – winter is a good time to repair damaged areas, improve drainage, and even prepare ground to lay new turf in milder, drier conditions. Keep the grass clear of fallen leaves.

■ Greenhouse – keep it tidy and well ventilated, clear dead leaves from plants to maintain plant health and keep watering to a minimum.

■ Get that propagator buzzing and sow a few early vegetable seeds. Sow sweet peas if you haven't already.

■ Importantly, now is a good time to clean, oil and sharpen tools ready for winter storage.

■ Browse the bulb and seed catalogues for next year's display and plan crop rotation for the vegetable patch.

## WINTER WILDLIFE

Hedgehogs and amphibians will be hibernating in log piles and heaps of leaves so best left undisturbed.

Leaving the top growth of herbaceous perennials to "die down" naturally, especially the hollow stems of sedums and grasses, offers great protection for ladybirds and other insects.

**A common garden visitor.** *Image/Dennis Brown*

Any activity in the winter garden seems to attract the eager attention of robins, always partial to a bit of cheese!

Birds will need extra feeding now, leaving seed heads on plants such as teasels will also provide forage for them – and access to clean water is essential.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Winter time does provide its beautiful moments so enjoy the low sun lighting frost-dusted grasses, seed heads and bare tree silhouettes.

Milder days bring out bees seeking scented winter blooms, of which there is a surprising variety such as skimmia, wintersweet, shrubby honeysuckle , daphne, mahonia and Christmas Box.

Maybe consider converting a section of the garden into a colourful, fragrant winter display, or, better still, turn your front garden over totally to the season!

An elegant grouping could consist of a winter flowering cherry tree as the key specimen with a cornus alba sibirica( red stems ) and/or Midwinter Fire (orange stems) under-planted with euonymus Emerald 'n Gold.

A low-growing conifer such as juniper Blue Star, and a dwarf golden yew will give a vertical accent.

For the lowest tier, perhaps a group of winter flowering heathers, a carpet of snowdrops and cyclamen, interspersed with hellebores and low growing evergreen grasses (festuca and carex varieties), will complete the scene.

This arrangement will be a real star in winter but still offer interest during the rest of the year. Passers-by will have a treat!

# Ranger Dave says goodbye

POPULAR Lickey Hills Country Park Ranger Dave Beardsmore (centre) recently bid goodbye to the Lickey Hills.

As a thanks for his service and dedication to the country park, The Lickey Hills Society presented Dave with a specially commissioned painting by Simon Woolford.

The society chairman, Mike Brooke, said that Dave had been an intergral part of the Lickey team, and that he had been instrumental in the park's events and during the wildfire on Rednal Hill in 2022.

Village What's On

# WHAT'S ON GUIDE

## THE 39 STEPS:

### Review By *Keith Woolford*

***THE 39 STEPS*, by John Buchan has toured the UK and internationally with great success. In fact, I've seen it five times in various theatres, so Alvechurch Dramatic Society had a real challenge on their hands to impress this particular fan.**

**The theatre version had only four actors playing well over 100 characters, surely the ten Alvechurch thespians was over kill? Nothing of the sort as, apart from our handsome hero Adam Brown who plays the restless Richard Hannay, back from his travels abroad, the other nine had a pretty energetic time of costume changes.**

**His love interest, Pamela, played by Leah Yendell, handled the indignant and handcuffed heroine with aplomb. Particularly when she removed her damp stockings (escape across the moors/puddles etc.) during that famous scene at the hotel, which would have raised an eyebrow or two when performed on celluloid moer than 85 years ago.**

**When you have the local vicar Gail Rodgers in the cast, you know it must be a wholesome offering. She played one of the underwear salesmen on the train, Margaret the brow-beaten crofter's wife and the Chief Inspector.**

**An excellent indication of how well it went was that the prompter, whom I was sitting next to, was completely silent!**

**A great performance and laughs in the all the right places with credit to joint directors Chris Davies and Samuel Perry who held firm the reins as it could have gone "Horribly wrong – am I right, Sir?"**

**The tortuous final scene, with Keith Williams as Mr Memory, who, having been shot, is reciting the stolen military formula (that enables silent flight) was outstanding and Keith managed the endless lines of gobbledegook with amazing expertise and hesitant timing.**

**A proper Am-Dram in a proper village hall – wonderful!**

### EVENTS

THE MIDLAND SINFONIA'S next and last concert in 2023 is 'TIS THE SEASON' on Saturday 2nd December in The Ark St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. An evening of music celebrating Winter including both Vivaldi's & Glazunov's 'Winter'.
They return on 3 February 2024 with 'THE HILLS ARE ALIVE' music inspired by mountains and landscapes including 'Scenes from the Scottish Highlands' by Granville Bantock, music from Rodger's & Hammerstein's much loved 'Sound of Music' score and Hoist's 'Brook Green Suite' in the Ark St Laurence Church Alvechurch.
Tickets: J15 (J3 students & under 16s) cash or card OR in advance J13 (J3) from midland-sinfonia.co.uk Gin & Pickles and The Lounge Alvechurch. Merry Christmas and all good wishes for 2024 from The Midland Sinfonia. www.midlandsinfonia.co.uk

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY holds its Annual Family Christmas Concert at 3pm on Saturday December 16 in St. Andrews Church, Barnt Green B45 8NR. Everybody is welcome to come and enjoy a programme of Seasonal Music and Readings, supported by a guest Musical Ensemble, Afterwards there will be refreshments in the Parish Hall. Tickets are £10 each (under 16's are free), and can be obtained in advance from members of the Society, or on the door on the day.

### MUSIC

ALVECHURCH COMMUNITY CHOIR usually meets in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mondays at 7.30pm with occasional pub and outdoor sessions and a live stream. The choir is inclusive and open to everyone, whether you think you can sing or not. For more information or to join or book them, see their website www.alvechurchcommunitychoir.org.uk. They finish their December sessions with an open carol singing evening at the Crown Inn on 18 December, and start again next year at the Crown on 8 January then at the Village Hall from 15 January.

BEOLEY VILLAGE HALL hosts live music, comedy, cinema and jazz nights. On Wednesday Jazz nights the bar opens at 7.45pm, with entertainment from 8.15pm. For Friday night events, the bar opens at 7pm with entertainment from 7.30pm, and on Saturdays the bar opens at 7.15pm with entertainment from 8pm.
For more information and details, contact Paul on 07973 759340 or Richard 01527 66646. The programme is subject to change if the circumstances dictate.

THE ASKLEPIOS ORCHESTRA will host their Autumn Concert in St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green, B45 8NR on 10 December 2023. The event will start at 7.30pm and the interesting programme includes Kay - An American Overture (arr. Armstrong), Parker - A Northern Ballad, Weill - Lady in the Dark medley (arr. Armstrong), Shore - Fellowship of the Ring Suite (arr. Whitney), Williams - Theme from Schindler's List, Gershwin - An American in Paris (arr. Armstrong).
Admission is free, with a retiring collection. You are warmly invited to come along to support them and bring your friends.
Their Spring concert will be held on Sunday 24th March.

BEL CANTO SINGERS, the well-known 4-part Worcestershire choir, are back to rehearsals at St. John's Church, Greenlands Avenue Redditch B98 7PZ on Monday evenings.
They are always happy to welcome new singers. They have a very wide and varied repertoire and a huge catalogue to include pop, fun pieces, musical theatre, jazz, folk music and traditional choral and classical mu sic along with much more.
Bel Canto Singers are a friendly and social group, under the guidance of Musical Director, Liz Green and accompanist, Wendy Quirk.
They are a non-profit making organisation and select a new charity each year to support both financially and with provision of their services. Just turn up at rehearsal on Mondays at 7.30pm where there will be a wide range of singing activities, light refreshments and chat. More information please contact Secretary Veronica Porter 07885 507899 or visit www.belcantosingers.org.uk

THE GEMINI Choir is seeking new singers. Info from Philip Morris on 07969 741137.

BLACKWELL Concert Band and Training Band is open to all brass and woodwind players of all abilities. To learn more about the band, book them, or find details of upcoming events, email blackwellconcertband98@gmail.com or visit www.blackwellconcertband.co.uk

SINGING For Health is a group aimed specifically at people with health problems, mental or physical. Face to face groups have now resumed, meeting on Wednesdays 2-3pm at Longbridge Retirement Village and Thursdays 2-3pm at St Chad's Church, Rubery (£3 per session). Everyone is welcome!

BROMSGROVE Music Centre runs FREE weekly string orchestra, concert band and beginner group Lift Off! sessions for young musicians. . New members always welcome! Sessions are run by Severn Arts at St John's Middle School, Bromsgrove, on Mondays 5.45–6.45pm Individual instrumental lessons are also provided at the centre. For more info, see www.severnarts.org.uk/music-centre-groups

BROMSGROVE Folk Club meets on the second and last Thurs every month at Catshill Club, starting at 8pm. For a full list of events call Bob Bignell on 0121 476 5938 or see www.bromsgrovefolkclub.co.uk

BROMSGROVE Rock Choir offers everyone the chance to sing pop, rock and chart songs – no audition needed. Free taster sessions available. More info at www.rockchoir.com or on 01252 714276.

BROMSGROVE Community Choir meets on Thurs evenings, 6–7 pm at Bromsgrove Methodist Church (main church hall). They sing for fun and enjoyment; everyone welcome, singers or not. Contact Ruth Henley for details on 01527 527022 or 07812 145267, or email r.g.henley@btinternet.com

BARNT GREEN CHORAL SOCIETY meets in the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, on Mondays from 7.45 - 9.45pm. The choir sings a range of music throughout the year, performing at least 3 concerts. New singers are always welcome and there is no need to audition! For more information, see barntgreenchoralsociety.org or facebook.com/barntgreenchoralsociety.

### DANCING

TANGO ARGENTINO at Barnt Green Quakers/Friends Meeting House on Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings. For further information: www.facebook.com/groups/tango42/announcements (no Facebook account needed).

AELFGYTHE Border Morris is seeking new dancers (female) and musicians (male or female) to join them for fun, exercise and dancing. They meet at 7.45pm every Weds in Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall. Everyone welcome. Come and play traditional folk music, or try Morris dancing. For more details call Pam on 07961 830 831.

FRENCH & Breton folk dancing meets at Alvechurch Village Hall on the first Sat each month from 2.30–5pm (Covid-dependent, so please check first by emailing alvechurchfrenchdance@gmail.com). Informal tuition and live music provided. New dancers (and musicians) welcome. £2 per session.

SEQUENCE Ballroom and Latin dancing every Mon evening at 8pm at the Longbridge Social Club, 1012 Bristol Road South, Northfield. Occasional free tuition. All welcome to a friendly fun-filled dance. Details from Kalvin on 07725 265024.

ALVECHURCH Morris Men are on the lookout for new dancers and musicians. They practise on Mondays at Alvechurch Baptist Church Hall, 8.30–10pm, followed by a "debrief" at a local hostelry. They dance in local towns and at various local and national events, and perform a world-famous (sort of) mummers play in the village every New Year's Day. No ability, fitness or co-ordination required – if you are male, 18+ and prepared to spend more time than is probably good for you in public houses, pop along to meet the group! Drop in to any practice, contact Steve on 07375 592928 or email: alvechurchbagman@gmail.com

NANCY Butterfly Morris Dancers dance in the North-West Morris style (clogs!) and practise at Catshill Methodist Church Hall on Monday evenings ready to meet up with other Morris sides for social events and festivals. They are very happy to welcome new adult dancers and musicians. See: www.nancybutterfly.co.uk or Facebook for what they get up to. You can contact them via the website or Jane on 07726 915289.

AVONCROFT Folk Dance Group enjoys anything from barn dances to ones seen in *Pride & Prejudice* or *Poldark*. All welcome, no need to have a partner. The group meets every Thurs from 8–10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. £2.50 incl refreshments. Info from Liz Stanton on 01905 353995 or liz@the-stantons.uk or visit www.avoncroftfdg.weebly.com

BJ's BUSY Boots Line Dancing Classes: Tues 2–3pm Bromsgrove Leisure Centre; 7–10pm Stoke Prior Sports/Country Club. Thurs 1.15–3.30pm Bromsgrove Methodist Church Centre. Social Dance usually 1st Sat in month at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane. It's a fun way to exercise. For more details phone Brenda on 01527 870151.

AMY GREAVES SCHOOL OF DANCE & Fitness offers a variety of classes for toddler up to adults. Based in Hopwood, Bournville and Longbridge. Contact 07979408997 amygreaves1@hotmail.co.uk www.amygreavesschoolofdance.com

SEQUENCE dancing every Tuesday evening at 8pm at Fairfield Village Hall, Bromsgrove. Welcoming and friendly atmosphere, all levels welcome. For further details please contact Joyce & Len on 0121 682 3266.

DANCE AND FITNESS at Bournheath Village Hall including Adult Zumba, Pilates and Stretch classes as well as KS1 and Baby Ballet. For more information message 'Dance With Nikki' on social media or n.foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

LINEDANCE CLASS, every Thursday between 6pm - 7pm at Extracare Longbridge Village. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

BEGINNERS LINEDANCE class, Tuesdays 6pm - 7pm at West Heath Community Centre, Hamstead House, B31 3QY. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

NEW SALSA dance classes, every Thursday at the Alvechruch Inn, B48 7LD. Doors open at 6pm. Beginners classes at 7pm, with the main class at 8pm. All classes are £9 each or both classes for £15. Come on your own or with friends. Contact 07779686679.

BALLROOM/LATIN SEQUENCE dance some line dance held on the first Friday of the month (check just in case Friday has to change because of commitments in the village) from 8pm -10.30pm at Extracare Longbridge Village, B31 2FZ. Contact Bryan 07975569065 for details.

### CLUBS, GROUPS & SOCIETIES

ST GODWALD'S Community Cafe meets every other Fri from 10am–noon at St Godwald's Room adjacent to the Church Hall, Finstall Road, Bromsgrove. Friendship, cake, tea/coffee. Donations welcome— monies to St Basil's charity for homeless youngsters. More info: davidrowe876@btinternet.com

BROMSGROVE Men In Sheds is a group for anyone (male or female) who has retired or been made redundant and wants to spend time with like-minded people. The group meets Mon–Thurs, 10am–2pm at Unit 1, Metals & Ores Industrial Estate, Stoke Prior B60 4JZ. You can find more information by

***continues overleaf***

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calling 01527 570490 or email enquiries@ageukbrwf.org.uk

BARNT GREEN QUAKERS invite you to their autumn film screenings. Admission is free however donations are welcome. Full details can be found at The Meeting House, 6 Sandhills Rd, Barnt Green.
On 15 December at 7pm the film will be the last Ealing Comedy: Five oddball criminals planning a bank robbery rent rooms on a cul-de-sac from an octogenarian widow under the pretext that they are classical musicians.
There will be three films on the 27, 28, 29 December at 7pm.
27 Dec: Marty McFly, a 17-year-old student, is accidentally sent 30 years into the past in a time-travelling DeLorean invented by the maverick scientist Doc Brown.
28 Dec: After visiting 2015, Marty repeats his visit to 1955 to prevent disastrous changes.
29 Dec: Stranded in 1955, Marty learns about the death of Doc Brown and travels back in time to save him. With no fuel available for the DeLorean, the two figure how to escape the Old West.
On 2 Jan the film will be a feature-length comedy thriller. Wallace and Gromit set out to discover the mystery behind the garden sabotage plaguing their village, threatening the annual giant vegetable contest.
On 19 Jan Royal Ballet films Beatrix Potter tales, followed by highly topical, stylish ballet with a serious message about endangered species. Introduced by Jonathan Payn, Principal Character Artist BRB.

PLACES OF WELCOME is a growing network of local community groups who provide their neighbourhoods with places where all people can feel safe and where they can connect, belong and contribute. The network is open in St Laurence Church and The Ark on Wednesdays 10.30am-12pm, all are open to everyone and offer friendship and hospitality, free refreshments and local knowledge about the neighbourhood. Visit www.placesofwelcome.org.uk or email info@placesofwelcome.org.uk

REDDITCH Military History Society usually meets monthly in St Luke's Church Hall (Evesham Road, Redditch, B97 4JX), 7 for 7.30pm. More info from Ron on 01527 545450 or ronnieg33b@hotmail.co.uk

FRIENDS Of Bittell Reservoirs is a group of local people interested in preserving the natural environment of the Site of Special Scientific Interest at Upper Bittell, Lower Bittell and Mill Shrub reservoirs, which are important staging posts for migrant birds and wildlife. If you have an interest in preserving this unique environment and would like to help in its preservation and maintenance, contact: Charles Deverill on cdjd26@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY runs a regular programme of social events and guided walks, as well as maintaining local footpaths. Talks and social events are held in the Village Hall, unless otherwise noted. Entry at talks and AGM is free for members and £1 for guests, including a drink and biscuits. Litter picks start at 10am. from the village square. Other social events are by ticket and details of venue, start time and price will be published by the organisers nearer the time. .
Their Christmas party will be on Saturday 16 December, including a ceilidh by The Orchard Band. Entry is by ticket only.
On Saturday 20 Janurary the popular Alvechurch Village Society Annual Quiz will be held at 7.30pm. Entry is by ticket only.
Please contact Gerard Nash on 0121 445 4454 for tickets for both of these events.
AVS is always pleased to welcome new members—contact Martin on 07742 100007 or martinclarke1@btinternet.com.

REDDITCH Community Shed is a project that encourages skills, combats loneliness, and provides a sense of worth in people who are retired or otherwise wondering what to do with themselves. They have a small woodworking work shop in the Kingfisher Centre just outside Primark and they are open Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Call in for tea and biscuits and a look round. More details at www.RedditchCommunityShed.co.uk or on FaceBook. If you're in Redditch of a Tuesday or Thursday they would be pleased to see you.

THE MONDAY Fellowship group meets at the Parish Centre behind St Andrew's Church in Barnt Green at 2.30pm on the second Monday every month; £2 to include tea and biscuits and an interesting talk. Info: Maureen Frowley on 0121 445 0880.

INNER WHEEL Club of Redditch welcomes you to its monthly meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at the Southcrest Hotel Redditch. An international Women's Organisation, they enjoy a bit of everything; walks, talks, days & evenings out, and everything in between whilst at the same time helping the community. Contact Anne Robertson for information 07580351361. Or email redditch.innerwheel@gmail.com or visit www.innerwheel.co.uk

BROMSGROVE U3A: No longer in full time work? Activity/interest groups and speaker meetings are happening throughout the month. Check website for details: www.u3asites.org.uk/bromsgrove/home

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Welcomes Refugees is a group of volunteers supporting local refugees who arrived under the government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons' Relocation Scheme (SVPRS). New volunteers always needed – training and support given. BRWR is open to all, irrespective of political or religious belief. Full details at www.brwr.uk

CATSHILL Carers and Bereavement Back Up Group is a group set up specifically to offer respite, socialising and occasional speakers to carers and bereaved in the area. It meets on the last Tues each month in the coffee bar area of Catshill Methodist Church Centre in Golden Cross Lane from 2.30pm for about 1.5hrs. All carers and bereaved welcome, as well as those who used to care for someone who has passed away or is now in a care facility. Tea and biscuits/cake provided – no charge. Contact Sheila (0121 445 2813) or Di (0121 445 3595) for details and encouragement.

BROMSGROVE Speakers Club meets at The Barn at The Bell at Belbroughton every other Tues, 7.45–10pm. Everyone who wants to gain confidence in public speaking is welcome, but you must book in advance via www.bromsgrovespeakers.org.uk, which also contains full details of events.

RE-ENGAGE (formerly Contact the Elderly) aims to help isolated elderly people by offering monthly tea parties where they can reconnect or make new friends in their own community. If you know of an elderly person who could benefit, please get in touch on 07539 276054. Guests need to be aged over 75 and living alone, and must be mobile enough to walk to a driver's car with assistance. Find info at www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk or on Facebook @ContacttheElderlyRedditch

AGE UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire have a free Dementia Café at Finstall Village hall. It is a free social hub aimed at people with dementia, their families, and carers in Bromsgrove and the surrounding areas. It takes place every 2nd Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-12.30pm.

BROMSGROVE Photographic Society is a friendly, active and mutually supportive club for those keen to learn about, or improve, their photographic and digital imaging skills. The growing membership has skills ranging from novice to highly skilled, within wide-ranging subjects. The club meets on Tues nights, 8-10pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. For more info, visit www.bromsgroveps.com or see Facebook and Twitter.

ROTARY Club of Bromsgrove meets every 2nd Tues of the month at Maekong Thai Restaurant, and every 4th Tues at Bromsgrove School, both 7pm for 7.30pm. New members welcome. For more info visit www.bromsgroverotary.org.uk or contact Ron Pearce on 07703 567982.

HEART Of England Speakers is a friendly public speaking club, based in Solihull. It is affiliated to Toastmasters International, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tues of each month, 7.30—9.30pm, at the Silhillians Sports Club and Events Centre. If you would like to boost your confidence get in touch via www.heart-speakers.org.uk, Instagram @toastmasters-heartofengland, or via LinkedIn.

REDDITCH Rotary Club meets Monday lunchtimes at the Abbey Hotel, Hither Green Lane, Redditch, B98 9BE. You would be very welcome to join in. Want to be involved, hear interesting speakers, and serve your community? Want to know more? Contact Peter Williams on 01527 60277.

LICKEY PHAB Club is a social club where people aged 14 and over, with and without disabilities, can come together each week to have fun! It is affiliated to national charity Phab. The club meets every Mon from 7.30–9.30pm at The Trinity Centre, Lickey Parish Hall to have fun, play games, do crafts or just chat – there's also a tuck shop! More info from Louise Boother on 07814 122990 or lickeyphabclub@hotmail.com

BEACON Ladies Club meets at 8pm on alternate Weds evenings at The Hawthorns Social Club, Rednal Hill Lane, Rednal. There is a varied programme of speakers and outings, including occasional visits to the theatre. New members of all ages welcome. £12 annual membership, plus £2 fortnightly. Call Barbara on 0121 445 3456 or Anita on 445 3770.

BARNT GREEN FRIENDSHIP CLUB meets every 2nd Tues of the month at 2.15pm at the Burcot Grange. Visitors £3 to include tea and biscuits. Members 50p. Ladies and gents both welcome. For more details call Rosalind on 0121 445 0598.

THE WORCESTER-BIRMINGHAM & DROITWICH CANALS SOCIETY holds regular monthly meetings in the meeting room behind The Weighbridge Pub, Scarfield Hill, Alvechurch on the first Tuesday of the month at 7.45pm. There is usually a guest speaker. They promote the upkeep of the canals to ensure that the heritage is looked after for all to enjoy and are a registered charity. Find out more: www.wbdcs.org.uk or Facebook @ wbdcs.org.uk. or email contact@wbdcs.org.uk. Non-members are welcome. Free entry.

ALVECHURCH WEDNESDAY CLUB usually meets on the second Weds each month. Wednesday 13 December is their end of year Christmas party with fun and games plus a raffle with lots of prizes to be won ! It will be held at the Cricket Club at 1.30pm. There will be no meeting in January but will restart on the second Wednesday in February, 2024. Same time same place! Happy Christmas to all members and prospective members.

COFFEE, Cake and Chat is a place to meet new friends or catch up with old friends (includes a dedicated baby area) on the 4th Friday of each month 10:30am - 12pm at The Wheel, Blackwell. No charge, donations welcome. More info on 0121 445 1425.

LICKEY Hills Local History Society meets monthly at 7.30pm in the Trinity Centre, Old Birmingham Road, Lickey B45 8ES. Annual subscription £15. Non-members £3 per meeting. For more information please email: info@lhlhs.org.uk or visit: www.lhlhs.org.uk

BROMSGROVE (1982) PROBUS Club provides opportunities for retired and semi retired men to meet socially. A members meeting is held at Avoncroft Arts Centre on the 3rd Wednesday monthly 10am until 12pm, including refreshments and a talk by a guest speaker.
Other regular activities include monthly walks, lunches including partners, snooker--, social outings and IT. For more info visit www.bromsgrove1982probus.weebly.com or contact Martin on 07717 150136.

BROMSGROVE & Redditch Soroptimists meets every 2nd Thurs of the month at Burcot Village Hall. New members welcome – pop to a meeting, email sibrsoroptimist@gmail.com or ring 07812 985927.

ALVECHURCH Historical Society has a planned programme of talks on the first Monday of the month at 7.45pm at The Ark, St Laurence Church, Alvechurch. More details from Anne Humphries on 0121 445 5955. New members welcome.

KINGFISHER PROBUS Club of Redditch is recruiting retired and semi-retired men to join them in a friendly environment. They meet every 2nd Thurs of the month at 11.30am at the Court Leet,174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove B61 7AY, with a short meeting at noon then lunch followed by an interesting talk given by a visiting speaker. Partners/friends welcome to join for walks, trips, golf, skittles and special lunches. Contact Chris Bailey on 01527 835802 for confirmation of date and venue. More info at www.kingfisherprobusredditch.co.uk

BROMSGROVE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY meets on the 3rd Monday of each month at Bromsgrove Rugby Club. Doors open 7.30pm, speakers begin 7.45pm. Admission free on your first visit; refreshments available. Observing meetings are also held on the first Monday each month – bring your telescopes. More info via www.broms-astro.org.uk, www.facebook.com/bromsastro or emailing info@broms-astro.org.uk

ROTARY CLUB of Lickey Hills meets on Monday evenings, 7.15 for 7.30pm, at Hillscourt Conference Centre (NASUWT head-

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quarters) on Rose Hill (B45 8RS). For details contact Graham Wiseman on 0121 460 1402.

SILVER THREADS, the Alvechurch club, meets on the first Weds each month at 2pm in Alvechurch Village Hall. You'll be sure of a welcome in this friendly atmosphere, where members can chat over a cup of tea. There are regular bingo sessions, and occasional days out. New members welcome. More info from Pat on 0121 447 8630.

WOODRUSH RUGBY Club "Old Dogs" meet at 8pm on the 2nd Thurs in the month at the Clubhouse, Icknield Street, 01564 822878. Open to all former players, social members and old friends for a social chat and the odd reminisce over a glass of beer. Join us: call Mike Betts on 07960 303254 or visit www.woodrushrfc.co.uk or info@woodrushrfc.co.uk

The North Worcestershire Association of the NATIONAL TRUST hold monthly meetings with interesting speakers on 3rd Thursday 7.30pm at Tardebigge Community Hall, also walks, outings and an annual holiday. For further info email Ros257@yahoo.co.uk

Bromsgrove & District AMATEUR RADIO CLUB meets every Friday evening from 7.30pm at Avoncroft Arts Centre. The club is open to anyone with an interest in Amateur Radio. More details from the secretary Alan on 07886 000052 or secretary@bromsgroveradioclub.co.uk

COMMUNITY COFFEE morning - open to all. Free refreshments and chat. Wednesdays 10-12 at Barnt Green Baptist Church. Enquiries can be made to: events@bgb.org.uk

THE MACULAR Society Barnt Green Support Group meets on the last Fri of the month (with some exceptions) at The Parish Centre, behind St Andrew's Church, Sandhills Road, Barnt Green, B45 8NR, 2–4pm. Friendly, self-help group, proving there is more to life than this devastating eye condition. New members always welcome. For more info, ring Wendy on 0121 445 1585 or Alan on 01527 877864.

## SPORT, FITNESS & HEALTH

UPTON WARREN SAILING CLUB sails throughout the year at Aztec (Upton Warren) opposite Webb's Garden Centre, Wychbold. A small, friendly club with both mixed fleet racing and cruising sessions. Most members sail their own boats but there are also club boats available for members to use. See www.uwsc.co.uk to find out more or contact membership@uwsc.co.uk

JOOLISM HIIT CLASSES. Semi-PT resistance training for ladies only in a well-equipped gym in Bromsgrove. For ladies who want toned and strong bodies. Attendance must be pre-booked via julie@joolismfitness.co.uk

WOODRUSH RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB, Icknield Street, Alvechurch, B38 0EL is recruiting: Senior (Men & Ladies) U17 Colts Mini/Junior & Micros. Call 07341 256821 for recruitment or 01564 822878 (Clubhouse) email info@woodushrfc.co.uk or see: www.drushrfc.co.uk Facebook @WoodrushRFC

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE SOCIETY'S WALKS are held at 2pm of the first Sunday of the month unless noted otherwise. For walks starting outside the village, please contact the walk leader if you need a lift. Occasionally, weather conditions mean that a walk must be cancelled at late notice: check with the leaders or the AVS website if unsure. Always wear appropriate footwear. Contact walks organiser Tony Brannon for more information about the walks: avswalks@gmail.com
There are a number of walks coming up, the next will be on Sunday 3 December "Around Spernal & Coughton Court", led by Gerard Nash. Meet at Haydon Way Wood car park B80 7EX. 0121 445 4454 for more info.
On Tuesday 26 December, Martin and Mariea Clarke will lead a Boxing Daywalk. Meet at the Lickey Hills Visitor Centre, B45 8ER. Contact 07742 10007 for details.
The following walk will be on Sunday 7 January, "A crisp and even walk", led by Ray Yarnell and Norma Devine, use 07508 699672. Meet at the car park off Tanyard Lane, B48 7RG.

On 4 February, Hilary Taylor will lead a walk from The Crown to Hopwood and back. Meet at The Crown, B48 7PN. Contact 0121 445 0107 for more information.

BARNT GREEN FISHING CLUB controls the fishing (both game and coarse) on the Bittell Reservoirs. Interested parties - contact: bgfcmembership@outlook.com or Facebook @ Barnt Green Fishing Club.

REDDITCH & Bromsgrove Company of Archers meet April–Sept, Mon 6.30pm and Fri 6.30pm at Meadow Park Football Ground (by Harris Brush Works – outdoors) and Oct–March on Fri 6.30pm at Studley Leisure Centre (indoors). Really friendly no-pressure club. New members always welcome (juniors from 8 years old, seniors from 18 to 80+, seasoned archers or absolute beginners).
Beginners' courses run throughout the year or taster sessions by appointment. Further info from rbcoaCoach@gmail.com, rbcoasecretary@gmail.com, or www.redditcharchers.org

REDDITCH Ramblers is a growing, friendly and sociable group offering a full walks programme including walks every Sat and Sun and a midweek walk most weeks. Sun walk is usually 6–9 miles; the Sat walk is more challenging, usually 10–12 miles. Midweek walks vary, sometimes morning walks followed by option of lunch or full day walking. The Saturday Strollers walk fortnightly (4–5 miles). Newcomers are always welcome and can walk three times with the group before deciding if they want to join. The group also arranges holidays, coach trips and social events throughout the year. Full info at redditch.ramblers@gmail.com or www.redditchramblers.org.uk

PHYSIOTHERAPY-LED Pilates Classes in Cofton Hackett, Barnt Green and Lickey Hills. Mixed ability Daytime and Evening classes available. Mother & Baby classes also run by Women's Health Physiotherapists. Small and welcoming classes aimed to improve balance, muscle tone and posture as well as overall body strength. Contact Elizabeth on 07850 604425 or elizabethalexanderltd@gmail.com or see www.elizabethalexanderphysiotherapy.com

CLUBBERCISE@ Alvechurch: Get sweat and glow! Get ready for exercise in disguise. You'll be dancing yourself happy and sweating until you sparkle, without even realising it. Mondays 7.30–8.30pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

POUND FITNESS@ Alvechurch: Channel your inner rockstar with this full body cardio-jam session. Using Ripstix®, lightly-weighted drumsticks engineered specifically for exercising, POUND transforms drumming into an incredibly effective way of working out. Weds 7.30–8.15pm at Alvechurch School. All places MUST be pre-booked via www.leeshfitness.co.uk or 07541 625939.

MEDITATION CLASSES for Everyone. Come and try a KIND approach to Meditation and experience for yourself the revitalising power of a relaxed, calm, clear mind, whether beginner or experienced practitioner. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, online or a mixture. REDUCE STRESS, FEEL CALMER, SLEEP BETTER. To join us for a trail contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F Sally My Yoga Mind

BARNT GREEN Sailing Club offers regular sailing, either racing or casual sailing, in beautiful surroundings at Upper Bittell reservoir. For info contact secretary@bgsc.uk or see www.sailingbarntgreen.com

BRIAR Rose Field Archers is a field archery club based near Bromsgrove. There are two qualified coaches for those interested in taking up the sport. For information contact briarrosefieldarchers@gmail.com

YOGA Really Works: classes on Thurs evenings (term-time only), 7–8pm at Cotteridge Quaker Meeting House, Watford Road. Six-week blocks £45. Slow and mindful rhythmic movement in time with the breath. Accessible venue— classes open to wheelchair uses and less abled persons. Contact George on 07490 781637 or yogareallyworks@outlook.com, see www.yogareallyworks.co.uk or on Facebook @Yogareallyworks

THE RAMBLERS Bromsgrove Group: Guided walking with our group for pleasure, fitness and fun. Full programme of walks / events throughout the year. More info at www.bromsgroveramblers.webs.com or call Martin on 01527 857117 or Peter on 01527 558203.

ALVECHURCH WALKING Buddies: join a regular local walk with like-minded people who simply want to go on a local, sedate and friendly walk with no pressure. Well-behaved owners and their dogs are very welcome. The group meets at 10.30am every Thurs. For more info, search for 'alvwb' on Facebook or contact Tony on 07763 468893.

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL run a series of weekly health walks around Bromsgrove and its districts. The walks are usually steady in pace and led by qualified walk leaders, and free to attend. Where it exists, walks are often followed by guided sessions on the park gym equipment.
Blackwell Gentle Walk, Wednesdays, 10.30am, start opposite the entrance to St. Catherine's Church.
Lickey End Walking for Health, Tuesdays, 10am, meet at Lickey End Recreation Ground car park. Oakalls and Harwood Park Health Walk, Wednesdays, 2pm, meet at The Oakalls Play Area. Sanders Park Walk, Mondays, 9.50am for 10am start, meet at the café kiosk near the car park. There are three options: Short (30mins), Medium (2-3miles in 60-75mins), and Fast (3+ miles in 60mins).
Bromsgrove Rural Walk, Fridays, 9.45am for 10am departure, meet in the Sanders Park car park extension. These rural walks vary between 4 and 7 miles and can involve driving, a system of car sharing has been established.
Stoke Heath Health Walks, Thursdays, 10.30am, meet at Stoke Heath Recreation Ground. Wythall Health Walk, Wednesday, 2pm, meet at Wythall car park B47 6LZ.

SOCIAL TENNIS takes place at Rubery Community & Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, Rubery B45 9AD on Mondays from 1–3pm. The group would welcome a few more players – just turn up or ring Don on 01527 759 318.

SARACEN Cycling Club is seeking new members. Men, ladies, beginners, and regular riders are all welcome. The long-established club meets regularly by the Tardebigge Pub on Thurs at 10am and Sun at 9.45am. See www.saracenroadclub.com or call Ivor on 0121 453 2287.

LONGBRIDGE Cycling Club meets weekly on Tues and either Sat or Sun. Ride pace generally at 9-11mph overall average, varied distances. Hotel and hostel weekends away, cycle camping adventures, social outings and much more. All ages, beginners, and seasoned cyclists all welcome. Call or text Deb on 07738 982161, email debweston@aol.com or see www.longbridgecyclingclub.com or Facebook @longbridgecyclingclub

MERCIAN NORDIC WALKING: come and try a taster session for fun, fitness and friendship. More info at www.merciannordicwalking.co.uk Online fitness and personal training available at www.mercianfitness.co.uk

PILATES with Steff Affleck (Rowney Green) Mat classes, apparatus 1:1 and duets. Irrespective of age, gender, health or fitness we could all benefit from understanding more about how to keep moving well. Joseph Pilates' system of exercise, using apparatus he invented, enables you to challenge what is strong, build what is weaker, exploring how you can balance the body to move away from pain and discomfort towards greater resilience and independence. Graduate of Pilates Professional Advanced Teacher Training; teaching Pilates for 17 years. Call 07759590830 or see www.steffaffleck.co.uk Mat classes and 1:1 (apparatus).

BARNT Green Sports Club (Margesson Drive, Barnt Green, B45 8LR) offers racquet sports in a friendly environment, plus running and cycling groups. Clubhouse with licensed bar. More info from Nick Butcher on 0121 445 1978 or visit www.barntgreensportsclub.co.uk

CATSHILL FC offers youth coaching sessions each Saturday morning at Catshill Middle School, Meadow Road, Catshill, B61 0JW. Boys and girls from Reception age upwards are welcome. Contact Gary on 07462 118920 or see www.catshillfc.co.uk for further info.

BROMSGROVE & REDDITCH Badminton Club welcomes players for social and league play. Playing Sunday evenings 5.40 to 7.40pm. Details from Steve Whittaker 07805 051456.

PILATES with Lottie Newberry: Physiotherapy-led Pilates classes every Monday in Alvechurch in the day and Barnt Green in the evening. Contact Lottie on lottienewberrypilates@hotmail.com. All abilities welcome.

ACTIVE SENIORS Exercise Classes at Alvechurch Village Hall, run by Bromsgrove council on Fridays starting 9.15am, £5 per class. Contact g.peart@hotmail.co.uk orc on 07828 515344 for more information.

YOGA for Every-Body. Come and try a fresh

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approach to Yoga, that works with your body rather than against it. A slow-paced, yet powerful Yoga for EveryBody, whether beginner or experienced, flexible or wishing you were. Classes with community and an experienced teacher, at The Ark, Alvechurch, Blackwell First School, online or a mixture. MOVE BETTER, BE CALMER, FEEL GREAT! To trial a class, contact Sally: www.MyYogaMind.co.uk, classes@MyYogaMind.co.uk, 07903 663085, F: Sally My Yoga Mind

TAI CHI (Qigong) sessions in Alvechurch Village Hall on Mon 10–11am and Friday 10.30. Qigong is an integration of physical postures, breathing techniques, and focused intentions. More details Nige on 07966069956 or nige@mindfulmoves.co.uk

FIVE WAYS Old Edwardians' Cricket Club at Ash Lane, Hopwood: Junior, Men's and Women's teams, come and join in! Open to all. Excellent facilities. Everyone welcome. Coaching for juniors on Fri evenings May to Aug. Contact Mark Tovey on 01527 835031.

NEW Ravens (North East Worcestershire Ravens Rugby League Club) is now based at Forshaw Heath Lane, Portway, B94 5LH. Junior training and 'little leaguers' take place on Sun mornings from 10.30am, with open-age and touch on Weds evenings from 7pm. All welcome at this family-orientated club. Contact Gail on 07515 020844 or Jason on 07957 248464 visit www.newravens.net

KINGS Norton Rhinos offers contact and non-contact rugby for children from Reception to Year 12. A safe and friendly introduction to rugby – and plenty of outdoor fun and exercise! Training takes place at KNRFC Ash Lane, Hopwood, on Sundays from 9.30–11.30am. Contact Simon Thompson on 07968 424585 or visit www.knrfc.co.uk

HOPWOOD Ladies Cycling Club meets at Hopwood Playing Field on Tuesdays at 11.30am and Wednesdays at 9.30am. For information, visit www.hopwoodladiescycling-club.co.uk or phone Sheila Evans on 07779 530017.

MARTIAL ARTS Kickboxing/Karate at The Ark Tuesdays 6.30-7.30. For more information please visit www.forcecombatmartialarts.co.uk

SLIMMING WORLD at Cofton Village Hall, on Wednesdays 9:30am, 5:30pm and 7:30pm.

ASSERTIVENESS AND HELPING SKILLS DONINGTON TRAINING runs classes at Alvechurch Village Hall. Easy, enjoyable and effective learning. Wednesdays from 19th January, pay what you think and can afford, any profits go to The Village Hall. For info: http://tinyurl.com/DTcdates or John Talbut (0121) 445 4607.

6 WEEK MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS COURSES to help you relax, find inner peace, and elevate your life. Join them on Wednesday evenings at The Friends Meeting House in Barnt Green or online whenever it suits you. Suitable for everyone! Enrol in the upcoming courses and discover how they've been changing lives at www.MeditationWithCoz.com or contact Coz at 07770067349. Follow on Facebook/Instagram: @MeditationWithCoz.

BARNT GREEN CHUGGERS & CHAINGANG provide run & cycling sessions for mixed abilities, those wanting to stay in shape plus those wishing to improve their running, cycling & fitness all in a social & recreational environment. Club Sessions - Chuggers (run) Monday & Wednesday 7pm and Chaingang (cycling) Wednesday 7pm & Saturday 9am all from Barnt Green Sports Club. For more info or to arrange a trial session please contact Membership Secretary kategallimore@googlemail.com

GENTLE EXERCISE CLASSES working on mobility, strength, flexibility and balance. Classes are very welcoming and inclusive and are held on: Wednesday's 1.30-2.30 at St Stephens Church Hall, Rednal and Thursdays 10am-11am Blackwell Community Hall, Blackwell. The cost is £5 per class. For more information call Lorraine 07866877881

## CHILDREN & FAMILIES

BABY Bounce & Rhyme is at Alvechurch Library Mondays 10–10.30am. Sing-a-long to traditional nursery rhymes and action songs.

STORYTIME at Alvechurch Library is on Tuesdays 11–11.30. Silly stories and tall tales for pre-school children to enjoy with parents and carers.

EVERY SCOUT GROUP in Bromsgrove (which includes Barnt Green, Blackwell, Catshill, Finstall and Lickey as well as the town centre) currently has girls and boys aged 6-18 waiting to join, their numbers restricted by the ratio of adults to young people.
A few more adults helping would enable existing leaders to open more Beaver, Cub, Scout and Explorer units allowing more young people to experience Scouting and learn skills for life. If you could spare a few hours each month please contact us on 07539 031740 or visit scoutshw.org.uk

CURIOUS CUBS: An outdoor playgroup promoting nature and learning through play. Sessions run on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays for walkers to five years. Based at Barnt Green Sports Club, Margesson Drive, B45 8LR. Visit www.curiouscubs.co.uk for more infomation and to book your place.

DRAMA TOTS: Award-winning imaginary play classes for children 18 months to 5 years. Classes run term-time on Monday mornings in Alvechurch/Thursdays in Finstall (other days/venues available). Contact Jo 07738 969460 for details.

TINY CHURCH (stay and play for under-5s and their carer) meets in Holy Trinity Church, Lickey, each Weds from 11.15am–12.30pm during term times. Games, toys, snacks and stories, and a time to meet together with God. Just pop along, ring 0121 445 1425 or email clive.rushton@btinternet.com

THE NATIONAL CHILDBIRTH TRUST (NCT) runs ever-popular antenatal and post-natal courses to grow your knowledge and your network, allowing you to feel prepared and confident moving into the next chapter of your life.
Discover and learn with other local parents-to-be, make vital connections and life-long friends in your community. Courses are held at St Andrew's Church, Barnt Green. Visit www.nct.org.uk/courses-workshops or call 0300 330 0700.

SOLIHULL BABY MASSAGE is at Rowney Green Village Hall on Tuesday's. A relaxed environment for parents and babies to bond through massage. Visit www.solihullbabymassage.co.uk

RHYTHM TIME is a fun, award-winning developmental music classes for the under 5's. Classes in Alvechurch, Barnt Green, Bromsgrove, Redditch and lots more. Contact Vicky 07712 675 697 or visit www.rhythmtime.net

NEW ROAD PARENTS SUPPORT for parents of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans children meets monthly in Bromsgrove. A confidential, voluntary, small support group for parents by parents. Close links with FFLAG.
Visit www.newroadparents.org, email newroadparents@gmail.com or get in touch via Facebook @New Road Parents Lgbtqi+ Support Group.

THEATRETRAIN Bromsgrove, performing arts for children 4-18yrs. Saturdays 10.30am-1.30pm. For a half-price trial email bromsgrove@theatretrain.co.uk or call 07766 724834.

TUTORING both online and in-person for Maths KS1 and KS2. English KS1 through to GCSE. For more information message 'Tutoring with Penny' on Facebook or email penny_foulkes@hotmail.co.uk

PRE-SCHOOL BALLET - NEW for September 2023 Pre-school (2 ½ - 4 yrs) ballet held at Barnt Green Baptist Church on Monday mornings from 10 am. Contact dancingpointe@outlook.com for further details.

## GAMES & COMPETITIONS

SHIRLEY & WYTHALL CHESS CLUB meets at Wythall Community Association in Silver Street, Wythall, B47 6LZ, every Thurs from 7.30pm. The club has four teams playing in competitive leagues. Friendly atmosphere. New players are most welcome, just turn up or contact Barry Knee on 01564 826250

MONDAY Bridge Club at Barnt Green Friends Meeting House meets on Monday evenings at 6.30pm. They would love to welcome new members. If you have played a little bridge in the past, come along to try the friendly club. For more information call Olivia on 07583 484065.

FRIDAY Bridge Club meets at Burcot Village Hall every Friday evening. We play friendly, competitive Bridge in comfortable surrounds. We meet at 18:45 for a prompt start at 19:00. Refreshments are provided free of charge. For full details please contact the Secretary Ed Payne on 07950951122 or visit www.bridgewebs.com/friday

BROMSGROVE Bridge Club plays every Tuesday evening from 7.25 to 10.30pm at The Court Leet (a Hungry Horse Pub) 174 Worcester Road, Bromsgrove, B61 7AY.
We are very friendly and welcome guests or potential new members, with or without a partner. The club is affiliated to the English Bridge Union and the Worcestershire Contract Bridge Association. Contact the Secretary, Sally Flood, on 01527 832468 or sallyflood@gmail.com

BROMSGROVE Board Gamers is a friendly group which meets at 7.30pm each Weds at the Ladybird Inn, Aston Fields. More info on Facebook 'Bromsgrove Board Gamers'.

BARNT Green Duplicate Bridge Club meets at St Andrew's Church Hall each Weds afternoon at 1.39pm. The club would make new members very welcome. For more information, speak to Cathy on 0121 445 1518.

REDDITCH CHESS CLUB meets at Alvechurch & Hopwood Cricket Club, Birmingham Road, Alvechurch B48 7TA, every Wednesday at 7.15pm September - May. The club has teams playing in both Birmingham and Worcester leagues. New players are welcome - just turn up or contact Giles Stanton on 07932 053621 or David Smith on 07540 304620.

## ART, CRAFT & LITERATURE

THE WITHYBED POETS are local people who write poetry and share and discuss it with each other. You don't have to live in Withybed Green, though most of their meetings are there. They meet regularly every six weeks or so. They like to read to local audiences and some of them write "poetry on request." The date of next meeting is 17 January. For more information, contact mail@marygreen.plus.com.

PAINTING & DRAWING If you enjoy painting and drawing, try this friendly community group which meets in the Rubery Leisure Centre, Holywell Lane, on Monday mornings, 9am-1pm, catering for all ages and abilities. The facilities are excellent for both indoor and outdoor working depending on personal preference and weather conditions. Tea and coffee is provided. Places are available. For further information telephone: 0121 453 7716 (Fridays).

COMMON THREAD: Bring your knitting, crochet, patchwork, sewing etc. All are welcome. Friendly help and chat. Meets on the last Saturday of each month (apart from Christmas Day, of course!) in The Wheel at St. Catherine's, Blackwell B60 1BN. Please bring your own drink to stay covid safe. Further information from Angela Bevan 0121 477 9924.

THE "CRAFTY LADIES" craft group meets every Monday morning in Alvechurch Library from 10am–1pm, with knitting, crocheting, sewing, quilting etc. More info on 01905 822722.

BURCOT WOODTURNING CLUB offers a friendly meeting place for woodturners of all abilities and experience. A varied programme includes demos, talks, hands-on practical evenings and visits to exhibitions. The group meets on the first Thurs each month, 7.15–9.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Visit www.burcotwoodturners.org.uk

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY is available to host day and short courses such as card-making or scrapbooking. If you have a skill to teach or share and would like to rent a space, call the Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

AVONCROFT ARTS SOCIETY at Avoncroft Arts Centre (Redditch Road, Bromsgrove B60 4JR), runs tutored/ non-tutored classes in Art, Textiles, Ceramics, Embroidery and Dance. Contact AAS on 01527 833829 or avoncroft-arts@btconnect.com

ALVECHURCH ART GROUP meets at the Baptist Hall (rear of church) every Tues from 1–3.30pm, using all mediums except oil. All welcome, especially beginners. Friendly tuition. Call Paul on 0121 445 5437 or drop in.

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY Readers Group meets in the library on the first Thursday of the month from 2pm–3pm. New members always welcome. And don't forget that you can access online audio and e-books 24/7, free of charge, by downloading the Borrowbox app. Visit www.worcestershire.gov.uk/libraries

LICKEY HILLS ART SOCIETY, a friendly bunch of artists and those interested in art, meet

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at Longbridge Methodist Church, Bristol Road, B45 9TY, on the first Sat each month at 7.30pm. Open to artists and non-artists alike. For more info email Lyn lyndasharp2010@yahoo.com or come along – the members would love to see you.

SEW TOGETHER meets on Tuesday mornings from 9.30am to 12.30pm during term time at the new Cofton Village hall. They meet weekly to sew and socialise. All abilities are welcome and there are a variety of sewing machines to borrow if required. For more information contact Avril on sewtogether64@gmail.com or see Sew Together Cofton Hackett on Facebook.

BARNT GREEN ART CLUB meets at Barnt Green Scout and Guide Headquarters in Blackwell Road just beyond the Barnt Green Social Club. They run Tuesday morning and afternoon sessions with visiting tutors at 2 - 3 week intervals. Interested artists of all abilities are welcome. Please phone Jackie on 0121 445 4745 for details.

MARLBROOK QUILTERS meet on the 1st Wednesday of the month at Avoncroft Arts Centre, Redditch Road, Stoke Heath, Bromsgrove B60 4JR. They are a small friendly group who would like to welcome new members. For more information contact Maggie Forknell 07973 313034 or Sheila Nunnerley 0121 445 2238.

THE SEASONS ART CLASS is an art course where you can discover your inner artist. Perfect for absolute beginners to improvers. Classes held at Rowney Green Village Hall, Bournheath Village Hall & Ullenhall Village Hall. Get in touch to find out more by emailing seasonsartredditch@outlook.com.

KINGS NORTON PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY meet at The Tennis Club, Grange Hill Road, Birmingham B38 8RE. Season starts 18/10/23 at 8.00pm. For information contact Dave Wall Tel: 0121 458 2562, email: dave.walluk@virgin.net

FORGE MILL CREATIVE TEXTILE GROUP are a friendly group of enthusiastic local stitchers, both experienced and beginners. They meet on Friday mornings at Beoley Village Hall. They are a leisure learning and development group exploring various techniques and media to create textiles artwork. Please contact Lynda on 0121 445 3212 or Janet on 0121 445 4335 for more information.

### GARDENS & FLOWERS

BLACKWELL COMMUNITY GARDEN in the grounds of St Catherine, Blackwell. Pop along to help water, plant and harvest. Info on 0121 445 1425.

ROWNEY GREEN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY usually meet at the Village Hall on the second Thursday each month at 7.15pm. There will be no meeting in December as this is a very busy period for people. The Committee would like to wish all its members and readers of The Village a very Merry Christmas and a very Healthy New Year. Look forward to announcing the programme for 2024 very shortly. For more information please telephone Lindsay Smith on 01527 592874.

DODFORD GARDENING CLUB meets on the 2nd Monday each month (except August) usually in Dodford Village Hall at 7.45pm. New members and visitors welcome. More info at www.dodfordgardeningclub.co.uk or call Penny on 07706 153618.

ROWNEY GREEN FLOWER CLUB, meets on the fourth Thursday of the month except in December when it is the first Thursday. The cost for visitors is £5, with refreshments included. Arrangements will be raffled at the event.

BROMSGROVE FLOWER CLUB holds regular monthly meetings on the 3rd Thursday of each month. Meets at 2pm, at All Saints Church Hall, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove B601AF. A yearly membership is available or come as a visitor & dip in & out. Refreshments & then a demonstration of flower arrangements and a raffle and you may be lucky and take one home. Further information on 0121 445 1915.

SOLIHULL & District Orchid Society meets on the 1st Sat each month at St George & St Teresa's Parish Centre, Station Road, Dorridge B39 8EZ. New members and visitors welcome. For more information or advice you can call Monica Johnson on 01926 747822 or email at kenneth.johnson99@ntlworld.com. You can also visit www.solihullorchidsociety.co.uk to see more.

### HELP & ADVICE

POPPIES' is a monthly bereavement support group — contact Rev Sheri Gidney on 0121 445 1185 for details.

DIVORCED/separated and having trouble seeing your children? Being excluded from their lives? The ASSOCIATION FOR SHARED PARENTING has been helping mums and dads in the family court system and problems over contact and residence for over 20 years. Visit www.associationforsharedparenting.org.uk

REPAIR CAFE is for those looking to save their money and fix broken or faulty household items. The Repair Cafe is part of an international network that keeps faulty appliances and clothes out of landfill and offers 'a cuppa' and a slice of cake to visitors while they wait. Visit the Repair Shop on the first Saturday of every month 2-5pm at All Saints Hall, Burcot Lane, B60 1AD. For more info: 07804251731 or repaircafebromsgrove@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH LIBRARY hosts one-to-one Computer Sessions for people wanting to learn the basics. If you need help with emails or advice on surfing online then pop in to arrange for free tuition, provided by volunteers. They can also help with online applications for Blue Badges and bus passes. For more info call The Hub on 01905 822722 and ask for Alvechurch Library.

GUIDE DOGS are looking for volunteers who could give a few hours of their time to help someone locally and living with sight loss, get out and about. Volunteer sighted guides support the person they are partnered with to feel part of the community.
No previous experience is necessary and full training will be provided and the role is extremely flexible! More information email MidlandsMSG@guidedogs.org.uk or visit www.guidedogs.org.uk

### WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

FINSTALL CROSS WI meets at Finstall Village Hall on the second Tuesday of the month at 7.30pm. For more info see www.finstallcross-wi.wordpress.com or email finstallcrosswi@gmail.com

BEOLEY WI meets on the first Tuesday of each month in Beoley Village Hall at 7.00pm. More info from Joan Lovett on 01527 584047 or email beoleysec@wfedwi.org.uk

BENTLEY PAUNCEFOOT WI meets at 7.30pm on the second Tues every month at Bentley Village Hall (B97 5TB). More information from Helen Spence on 01527 822611 or email bentleypauncefootsec@wfedwi.org.uk

BARNT GREEN WI meets at the Baptist Church at 7.30pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month. For more information: Jenny Jellie 07983 865372.

BROMSGROVE BELLES WI meets on the second Monday each month at the Meeting Room at St Godwald's Church at 7.30pm. For more info, contact President Helen Holbeche at helenholbeche@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH WI meets on the second Monday each month in Alvechurch Village Hall, at 7.30pm. For more information email Lin Neal lin.neal@hotmail.com or alvechurch-pres@wfedwi.org.uk

LICKEY WI usually meets on the first Tues every month at 7.30pm in the Parish Hall (Trinity Centre), Old Birmingham Road, Lickey. More info from Jenny Ryder on 0121 445 1872, Lickeywi@gmail.com or www.lickeywi.wordpress.com

HILLSIDE AT ALVECHURCH WI meets at 7.45pm on the first Weds each month at The Ark, Alvechurch. For more info call Pat McDonagh on 0121 628 4121.

BLACKWELL & BURCOT WI meets at Burcot Village Hall on the second Weds each month, at 2pm. For info call President Mrs Barbara Knight on 0121 445 3456.

HOPWOOD WI meets at Hopwood Village Hall on the first Thurs of the month at 7.30pm. For more information call Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668.

ST CATHERINE'S BLACKWELL WI meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7.30pm at Burcot Village Hall. Contact Sue Barrett for more information on 01527 596092 or susan-barratt222@gmail.com

RUBERY WI meets on the 2nd Weds of the month at 7.30pm at Beacon Church Centre, when there are speakers, activities and competitions. The 4th Weds of each month is the craft evening. Non-members are welcome. Contact Judie1055@yahoo.co.uk 07810765314.

FAIRFIELD WI meet at Fairfield village hall on the second Wednesday of the month at 7pm. For further details contact Carol Hine at fairfieldwi1932@gmail.com

### VILLAGE VENUES FOR HIRE

HOPWOOD VILLAGE HALL is available for hire for parties, groups and gatherings. Please contact Booking Secretary Ann Thurrell on 0121 447 7668 or visit www.hopwoodvillagehall.co.uk

TARDEBIGGE COMMUNITY HALL for hire: large, bright facility for functions, clubs, societies and all activities. To book call 07763 446902 or email tchbookings@gmail.com

THE WHEEL COMMUNITY ROOM IN BLACKWELL has daytime, evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire —more info on 0121 445 1425.

THE TRINITY CENTRE IN LICKEY has evening and weekend availability for one-off and regular hire – more info on 0121 445 1425.

BARNT GREEN PARISH CENTRE has large and medium sized lounges available for regular hire for some morning and early afternoon sessions each week. Please contact the Parish Administrator on 0121 447 7097.

THE ARK AT ST LAURENCE has a large hall and kitchen, and smaller upper room for hire, for one-off and regular hires. More information and bookings please contact Lynda on 0121 447 7955 or email admin@thearkalvechurch.co.uk

ALVECHURCH VILLAGE HALL is available for hire to groups, clubs, societies, and private parties. The hall has a stage, PA system, kitchen and bar area. There is also a smaller conference room available for hire. Enquiries to the Hall Manager Andrea Ottley on 07455892909 or hallmanager.avh@gmail.com

ALVECHURCH CRICKET CLUB PAVILION is available for hire: weekdays for community groups/clubs/societies, evening functions/private parties. Licensed bar, dance floor, kitchen area and great outdoor space. Enquiries to Stuart Brereton via 07775 714165 or ahcc.bar@gmail.com

FAIRFIELD VILLAGE HALL is available to hire for functions, groups and parties. It has a large hall with kitchen facilities. Contact the booking secretary Andrew on 07762749943 or bookings@fvh.org.uk. See website for details www.fvh.org.uk

### FEATURE IN WHAT'S ON

**The deadline for submissions to feature in the What's On section in the Feburary 2024 issue of *The Village* is 5 January 2024. mail: info@villageonline.co.uk**







# *The Rousler* rolls back time in Bromsgrove

THE latest edition of *The Bromsgrove Rousler*, the local history magazine published by the Bromsgrove Society, is now available. The 2023 edition – number 38 in the series – features personalities and events that have helped shape Bromsgrove's history.

This issue tells the story of how Bromsgrove's three-tier school system was introduced.

The cover story, written by James Baker, former headmaster of South Bromsgrove High School, explores the discussions which took place behind the scenes in the early 1970s, leading to the reforms and the system we have today.

Those who backed the existing grammar school system managed to thwart the Local Education Authority's original proposals, to protect the privileges enjoyed by the selective High School. Parents from the Redditch area were able to mould the plans to their benefit.

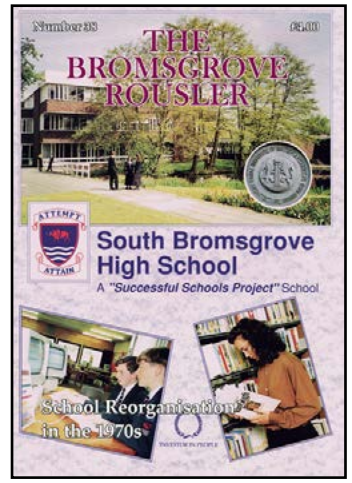
There is also a profile of Finstall Park School, an independent boys' school that operated in the town during the 1930s and 40s. The boys enjoyed camping, cricket and rugby, were taught to knit for the war effort, and would hide in the cellar from German bombs.

Other articles take a step back in time, to explore Bromsgrove's rich history, including an account by Dianne Erismann, who now lives in Canada, of her memories growing up in Stoke Works in the 1950s and tales of the village's history.

Tony Shinner describes the role his great-grandfather William Shinner played in bringing water to the town while he was manager of the East Worcestershire Water Company.

Tony's grandfather Harry Shinner, a keen photographer, captured unique pictures of the equipment used in two new pumping stations at Burcot and at Washingstocks, Catshill, in the 1920s.

Also in this year's edition are the late R.B. ('Tim') Brotherton's memories of Bromsgrove Market in the 1930s, which was first published in 2002. It is one of a series of notable articles from *The Rousler* back catalogue that are being reprinted in the run-up to the magazine's 40th anniversary in 2025.




**"A Successful Schools project": James Baker examines the 1970s reorganisation of the school system.**

■ **The Rousler is available through the Society's website www.bsoc.co.uk and on social media @bromsgrovesoc. It is also available, for £4, from a wide range of retail and other outlets across the district.**

# A MILLION THANKS TO YOU

## Rachel Rollinson, Youth Co-ordinator for The Lounge looks over the past year and towards 2024.

IN 2011, the charity Alvechurch Communities Together, set up The Lounge Community cafe in Alvechurch.

They aimed to provide a safe and welcoming space in the community and offer a youth provision for young people to access and belong to an inclusive and supportive group.

We really do feel at the heart of the community, so we wanted express our thanks for all the support we receive in so many ways.

To our customers, old and new, supporting our cafe, leaving reviews and recommendations. To our amazing team of regular café volunteers and individuals who support our Youth Sessions and senior Friendship group. As well as many more individuals who come and help at our community events throughout the year.

To those who give up their time to run sessions such as musical bingo, Tai chi & meditations in our senior support group Friendship Matters for free.

The team of charity trustees who are also all volunteers, giving up their time, making sure the charity continues to run smoothly and provide its core values to the community.

To those who: bake, mend, make and lend. Importantly, our wonderful staff team, who are always there with a friendly face.

To the local business' and groups who donate prizes, support our events and run their own fundraisers in aid of the charity; Alvechurch Communities Together.

We'd also like to thank the individuals and organisations who have supported us through funding. Thank you to Alvechurch Parish Council,

**A trip down memory lane: Cadbury Heritage tour.**

who generously gave The Lounge £4,000 this financial year to support our Youth provision.

Thanks for the Equality Small Grant funding from Bromsgrove District Council and the Levelling Up funding from Bromsgrove District Council for our Friendship Matters group.

We also feel incredibly lucky to have continued to been part of Co-op's Local Community Fund, for the last year supporting Friendship Matters and going forward for the next year, our youth provision. This funding total accumulates when you shop at our local Co-op, so please consider choosing The Lounge as your cause on your Co-op app or by calling them to let them know that you want to support us, as every penny really does count.

We also received Co-op's Warm Spaces funding and they matched our crowdfunder total, received from the local public.

All café proceeds and grant funding are invested back into the community to be able to run community groups including Friendship Matters which runs every Monday to help combat loneliness, isolation and improve wellbeing.

The Lounge runs four weekly sessions for young people running

**Spooktacular tombola winner: with knitted owl prize, donated by Knit and Natter group.**

on Tuesdays and Thursday evenings after school, a space where young people can socialise and play games with their friends in a relaxed and safe venue.

The Lounge runs community events throughout the year including the Easter Trail, Picnic in the Park stall, The Pumpkin Trail, a new addition this year. We had a wonderful turn out for our Spooktaular Event on 31st October, which raised £430 for the charity.

This festive season The Lounge will be running our Acts of Kindness campaign, letters from the North Pole and popular Breakfast with Santa. We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, especially to help out in their busy community café,

For more information get in touch via The Lounge Facebook page or email. admin@alvechurchlounge.org.uk.

Your community support is invaluable to our charity so from the whole team at The Lounge: thanks a million, Merry Christmas and we look forward to serving you in the New Year!

**Above: Action from Alvechurch FC's first home loss of the season to Coalville Town.** Pictures/***Ian Macvie***.

# Searching for a win

The honeymoon has ended for Alvechurch FC under new manager James Fry with not a single league win in more than six weeks.

After a previous run of four wins and one draw, culminating in a battling 0-1 away at high-flying Stamford on October 14, fortunes changed.

The club has since recorded four league losses and two draws in the Southern Central league.

The Church are also out of the FA Trophy after a 1-0 home loss to Coalville Town and exited the Birmingham Senior Cup after a penalty shoot-out with Boldmere.

They will hope for better things as they travel to Southern league one side Malvern Town in the Worcestershire Senior Cup on January 9.

With almost half of the season gone, Alvechurch had slipped to 17th place in the league on 20 points, just behind Leiston, who climbed ahead by beating Church 0-2 despite their long journey from the shadow of Sizewell B nuclear power station on the Suffolk coast.

As *The Village* went to press, The Church were preparing to take on local rivals Stourbridge, on 21 points, hoping to secure their first victory in a long time and leapfrog the opposition.

■ You can now keep up with all of the men's first team games on YouTube channel @Alvechurch Matchdays

### AFC FIXTURES

**December**

**9th Royston Town (h) 3.00**
**16th Stratford Town (a) 3.00**
**23rd Needham Market (h) 3.00**
**26th Redditch United (a) 3.00**

**January**

**1st Halesowen Town (h) 3.00**
**6th Barwell (a) 3.00**
**9th Malvern Town (a) 7.45 (Worcestershire Senior Cup)**
**13th AFC Sudbury (a) 3.00**
**20th Hitchin Town (h) 3.00**
**27th Leamington (a) 3.00**

## Scouting for a scout

ALVECHURCH FC are looking for an "ambitious and self-motivated chief scout" to join their team of staff.

A full driving licence is needed and the person needs experience in putting together opposition scouting reports and be able to cover games locally and nationally via a team of scouts.

Contact mark@alvechurch.co.uk or call 07564926231

## Warm welcomes

THE CLUB welcomed midfield players Theo Rowe and Cameron Eubank. Theo started his career at Stoke City and has gained experience having played for Banbury, Redditch United and most recently Coleshill Town

Cameron is comfortable playing in both midfield or up front and has joined on a short term loan from Birmingham City where he has played from the age of 13.

Meanwhile, having made such a impression with match-winning goalkeeping performances on his one month loan from West Bromwich Albion the club was delighted that Bradley Foster extended his loan for another three months

## Keep on playing

ALVECHURCH FC is hosting a walking football scheme based at the training ground at The Hayes in West Heath.

The scheme is available to both men and women aged 50-plus, every Monday at 4pm and is free of charge.

For more information please email PaulWeaver3@googlemail.com

## Knees going trembley!

FOOTBALL LEGEND Ossie Ardiles is among the speakers at Alvechurch FC's annual Sporting Luncheon.

The Argentine World Cup winner will join fellow former Spurs star Graham Roberts and ex- England Test cricketer Geoff Miller to entertain diners at the event on Friday May 3 2024.

Single tickets for the event are £70 and a table for ten is £650.

Contact Richard Thorndike: richard@thehayes.co.uk (07834 351696) for further details.

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